

RECORD OF WORTENIA WAR

ウォルテニア 戦記



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XI

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– Wortenia Senki –

- VOLUME 5 - Epiroz Take Over Arc

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[Hasutsuki]

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「鬼哭か……」

そう呟くと、亮真はかがり火に
鬼哭と呼んだ刀を翳して見せる。



「さて、まずは
謝罪とお礼の言葉を
伝えなければならんな」

「何と言つても、
亮真様は救国の英雄ですから」

「夜中にすまなかったな」

「いえ、お気になさらずに」



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WORLD MAP of 《RECORD OF WORTENIA WAR》



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「御子柴殿。
ザルーダ王国よりの
無事のご帰還。
まことに嬉しく思います」

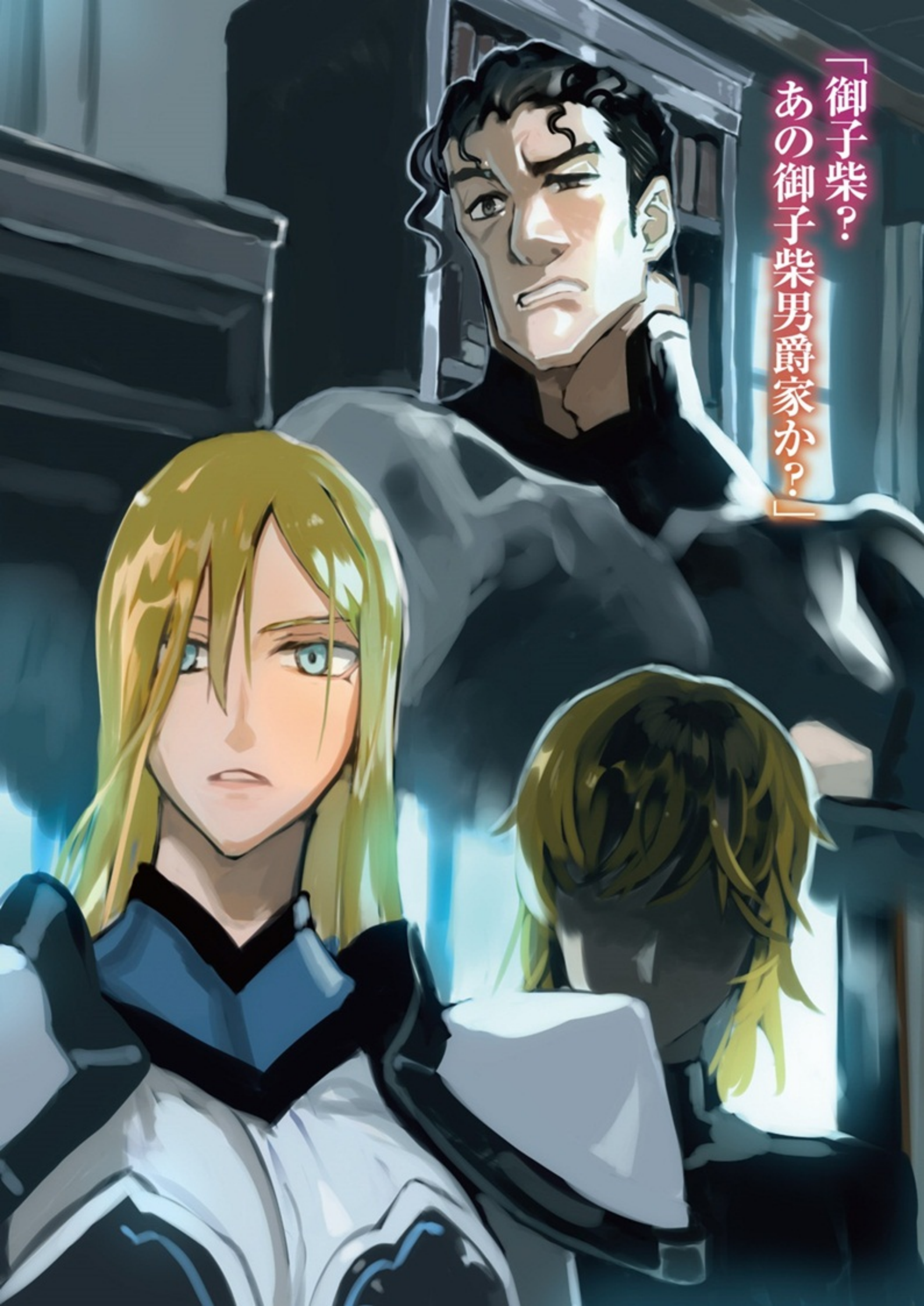


「新たな仕事を命じる前に
まずは確認しておきたい」

「北部十家を叩き潰す」

その時、
ケ빈は確かに聞いた。
歴史の歯車が軋みながら
回り始めた音を。

「御子柴？
あの御子柴男爵家か？」



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保利亮太



WORLD MAP of 《RECORD OF WORTENIA WAR》



ウォルテニア半島 地図

西方大陸 地図



Chapter 1

Return 1

“Ha, ha, ha, ha...”

Rough breathing could be heard.

Although he knew that his action could've informed the enemy of his position, his body didn't listen to the young man's mind.

Certainly, the young man's body who had experienced many battlefields was strong. Furthermore, it was also being strengthened by magic arts.

However, even if he possessed muscular strength and endurance that can't be compared to the regular guys, he still possessed the body of a human being.

His body still needed to inhale oxygen into its lungs, burn sugar and fat inside his body to produce energy. Then, the energy generated would be consumed by the muscles, oxygen then turns into carbon dioxide and is released outside of his body. Such fundamental things that were characteristic of a human being, didn't change no matter how strong one became.

The young man was one of the best among the guild members and was C ranked.

He wiped sweat dripping from his forehead with his hand. The young man then took the leather water jug hanging on his waist toward his mouth.

Water tasting like animal's skin entered his mouth.

It was not the taste that could be said as delicious, but for the young man whose life depended on it, he can only think of the water as equal to high-quality wine.

“I should be okay now...”

After he squeezed the water to the last drop, he threw away the leather jug while feeling irritated.

If he could reach a water spring scattered inside the forest, he should be able to replenish the jug.

Actually, the young man had memorized the Wortenia Peninsula map he saw at the guild.

Although it was not something that can be compared to a modern world map, it was enough to at least give him the directions of where he could find water.

However, he never got a single chance to reach those water springs.

(They intentionally pursue me towards the direction opposite of those water springs... They tried to exhaust my stamina...)

He spits out his irritation while glancing backward.

He was someone who could run 10 kilometers straight on the highway and feel nothing about it, but this place was an uninhabited place. The trees and the monsters living in the forest disturbed his escape path, with unknown pursuers following behind him, he was being cornered mentally and physically.

Such situation made him want to take a small break somewhere...

(Fuck this shit...)

The comrade who urged him to take on this job had already gone to hell first...

He was a greedy man, but the young man strangely got along with him.

When they had a good income they often went together to the bar or brothel.

However, inside the current young man's mind were regrets that he accepted this job, after being persuaded by his comrade who had already died.

The amount of the reward for this job was five times more than normal. Furthermore, they paid the money in advance and depending on the result of the investigation, a bonus will be given.

Although it was suspicious that the job didn't go through the guild but directly from the nobles, the amount of the reward was very delicious to pass...

That was why the young man took part in this job.

However...

(What do you mean by a simple investigation... That bastard... Involving me in this kind of shitty job...)

Wortenia Peninsula.

It was a name that one should have heard once if the person belonged to the guild.

And indeed, the young man had heard rumors about the land in the past.

According to the rumors, the territory was abandoned and became the home base of pirates, and a hidden sanctuary for demi-humans...

It was a harsh place, but it was also filled with a mountain of treasures that were in the form of high-level monsters with skins and fangs that could be traded at a very high price.

Every time such stories were told, he and his comrades would raise high their arm in a bar while saying that one day they would go there.

After all, if they go there and come back, the guild will recognize you as a skilled person.

Thus, it was natural for the young man to feel both admiration and fear towards the place.

And it was about two years ago that changes happened to that Wortenia Peninsula. Suddenly, a nobleman with a name that had never been heard before was born, and the ruler of the Rozeria Kingdom had given that nobleman the Wortenia Peninsula.

It was like a thunderbolt out of the blue sky.

Many people felt surprised when they heard that an unknown mercenary was given a noble rank, but soon they laughed at said mercenary when he was given the Wortenia Peninsula.

Although it was a reward, for normal people who knew about the territory, they could only see it as harassment and punishment to the mercenary.

Certainly, the Wortenia Peninsula was a vast land for a noble to possess as one's territory.

Even within the western continent, only a few nobles possessed such vast land.

But no matter how large the territory was, there was no meaning in it if there were no people residing inside said territory.

The land had no industries, and no people to rule, in other words, a fake ruler.

Or rather, in case of people to rule then there were only the pirates.

Either way, in the eyes of the general public, Baron Mikoshiba was a popular person, but mostly known as an idiotic noble or unlucky one.

However, the young man realized that such evaluation was a big mistake.

“The one who created that must be... a monster...”

The sight he saw from the top of the hill emerged inside the young man’s mind, then words of curses and admiration came out from the young man’s mouth.

He might be someone who was born in the countryside of the Rozeria Kingdom, but he never saw a city as big as that...

Surely, the scale was still inferior when it was compared to the Ortomea Empire’s capital city that he heard from his colleagues...

However, if one looked at the city surrounded by the heavy city’s walls and the huge harbor, nobody would be able to calm down.

And at the center of the bay, a castle was being built.

That magnificent castle overwhelmed the heart of the young man and his comrade.

“I will definitely report it... about that place...”

Right now, nobody knew the exact situation within the Wortenia peninsula.

That was because Baron Mikoshiba refused to create a guild branch within the Wortenia Peninsula, and set up an official office north of the Salzberg territory, blocking almost all traffic.

Because of that reason, right now the requests for gathering resources in the Wortenia Peninsula increased, and the requests of the neighboring nobles who wanted to know

the truth regarding the situation within the peninsula cannot be ignored.

And thanks to that, the reward for the job this time was good, but the reality was heartless.

“I will tell them that, that place is a monster’s den... That everyone who comes there will be erased...”

After Baron Mikoshiba Ryouma took the Wortenia Peninsula, an incident occurred where all of the mercenaries and adventurers who head towards the peninsula disappear.

Initially, the people from the guild thought it was because those mercenaries and adventurers misunderstood their skills and got killed by the monsters, but the young man knows the true reason for that incident.

The huge fortified city he saw from the top of the cliff tells everything.

The skills capable of building such city in this wild territory in just a few years was exactly the work of a monster.

The sense of returning back together with the information moved the young man’s body.

Losing his comrade, he thought that at least if he survived it would compensate for everything...

Eventually, the young man’s path started to open.

The moment he came out from the forest of the foothills, he would be near the border of Earl Salzberg’s territory.

The young man used all of his strength and ignored the fatigue to move his body frantically.

(A bit more... A little bit more...)

The young man kept running desperately. However, before long, suddenly, black shadows fall down from the top of the tree...

Something glowing reflected in his eyes, and something cold struck the young man’s

throat.

“Eh?”

The young man stopped his feet and his hands touched his throat with fear and astonishment.

Warm sticky fluid. Something other than sweat flowed out of the young man's neck.

He felt that his hand became dull and the young man fearfully looked at the hand that touched the liquid.

“Blood...”

Every time his heart beat, blood dripped from his neck to his chest.

His hand was dyed with the dark red blood.

Hot blood clogged the youth throat, and he immediately fell down to the ground.

“He is a lucky guy, to be able to run up to this place...”

The black shadow overlooking the dead body of the young man said those words with inorganic voice while wiping off the blood from the kodachi using cloth.<TLN: Kodachi – Japanese Short Sword> –

“Those guys seem to have trained well, but I guess they still have a long way to go... Should I tell Genou-dono to train them a little bit more strictly?”

“Well, I don't think that was the problem you know, Ryuusai-dono?. Only in a few months, those children have become quite skilled. If you do things too harshly nothing would come out of it... Our Lord also told us to not train them too harshly no? Let's not get impatient here...”

Hearing the woman voice from behind, the shadow turned around slowly.

“Well, that might be true, but Oume-dono, don't you think we should raise our ability a bit more before our Lord returns back?”

Ryuusai voiced his dissatisfaction.

For Ryuusai who was responsible for the rise and fall of the Iga clan as one of the elders, he wanted to appeal the value of his clan even if it was only a little bit more.

Shinobi only exist as a tool.

And tools only found meaning when being used by humans.

“Well, I can understand your feelings... Those kids already managed to at least deal with up to four intruders. Isn’t it fine to recognize their efforts a bit?”

“Which means this guy ability is above average, huh?”

Ryuusai kicked the young man’s corpse abruptly.

“Right... Also, this is why we’re here, to purge this kind of guy...”

In those words, Ryuusai reluctantly nodded his head.

Actually, it was not just for sight-seeing that the two elders of the Iga clan showed up in this kind of remote place.

“Certainly... Oume-dono is right...”

“The training method that our Lord provided is actually quite successful. After all, despite being just children, they are competent enough to perform shinobi work now...”

“To be honest, at first I could not understand when he told me that we should let these guys cross over the border intentionally...”

Saying that Ryuusai showed a bitter smile.

The development of Sirius city cannot be known to others yet.

Sooner or later, the city would become a popular trade in the whole continent. However, right now Mikoshiba Ryouma was currently on a mission to the Zalda Kingdom and out of the office, if such informations leaked out, one cannot predict

what kind of movements would happen.

That was why it was right to block the information leaks by doing a total border blockade.

But the problem was Ryouma other command.

“I also felt that way... Other than the esteemed one, who else is going to devise this kind of dangerous training after intentionally letting the spy enter the peninsula. Although it is true that through the experience, the ability of those kids will surely rise.”

Instead of blocking the spy invasion on the border, let them invade until closer to the city.

At first glance, that order seems to be unreasonable and provide them with unnecessary risk, but in reality, it was the reverse.

It was making use of the selfish thought of human being.

And in fact, such plan was working very well.

For the short period of time since the slave children had been brought to the city from places all over the kingdom, they now were able to perform shinobi works.

“I once heard that a lion give their children a weakened prey when teaching them how to hunt, is this the same principle I wonder?”

“Well, giving them courage by doing that was the right thing...”

“But, if that is the case then, this training method also has become quite dangerous, don’t you think?”

“I guess so... Although I’ve not yet told Ryuusai-dono about this, lately those who manage to avoid the children’s pursuit and close in to the border to escape has increased.”

“I see, so that was why you called me...”

Listening to Oume’s words, Ryuusai sighed deeply.

Certainly, unless they were fools, they wouldn't keep sending spies without taking any counter-measures each time.

"That's right, Although it should be fine right now, but then, I think it would be better to call you early..."

Naturally, if no one returned after being dispatched to the peninsula, the guild would then raise the rank qualification.

At first, those of rank E and F were dispatched, but recently, people who had the skill of rank B began to appear.

If one were to go with this trend, soon those who possess the ability of rank A would appear.

If that was the case, it would not be always possible to dispose of the intruders however they wanted, even though they had the geographic advantage. With that being the case, they thought of performing a double layered defense so that no one would be missed.

"It would be alright if all of the future intruders were of this level but, I guess that is an optimistic thought of mine..."

"Well, about that, we can just consult with our Lord after he comes back..."

Hearing those words, Ryuusai nodded his head then looked up at the southern sky.

"Two more days, huh?"

"I guess that is about right..."

TLN: This volume(5th) will be the start of Ryouma taking over the Rozeria Kingdom.

Chapter 2

Return 2

Sirius city was wrapped in the darkness of the night.

From the mansion built in the center, the light was still on despite being late of night.

It was around this afternoon that the celebration at Pireaus, Rozeria Kingdom's capital, took place. And after that, he went back to his city after more than one year of being an absentee.

After leaving his job for more than one year, he was forced to sit down and do all of the delayed document works.

The present Ryouma had no time to rest.

(As expected of the life of a feudal lord, huh?)

A smile of self-ridicule showed up on his face.

Ryouma read a bunch of thick reports while resting his elbows on the desk.

It was a counter-espionage plan that was going to be set up around the Wortenia Peninsula described in detail, made by Genou.

(The problems and proposal for improvements. Then what I should prioritize. Whether it is Genou or Bolts, both of them lacked sophistication...)

Ryouma nodded his head lightly in satisfaction.

Of course, those two men were not civil servants thus they were not good with desk jobs.

The quality of those written sentences was not that high.

It was very rough since it was a fact that they have never actually done any desk jobs.

If they showed these documents to the civil servants who served the royal family, it

would probably go to the garbage box without being reviewed after calling it a scribble made by barbarians.

However, although he knew the importance of an official written style, as long it was readable, for Ryouma it was not important whether or not it was on par with the usual style of official documents.

What was important for Wortenia Peninsula were people with ideas, and people to lead those ideas.

Furthermore, Ryouma wouldn't have left the territory to the two people, if it didn't have any chance of success, even if there were no other people other than them.

The basics of managing and operating an organization was always the same no matter where.

One needs a short-term goal, mid-term goals, and long-term goals. After one decides on them, one needs to further clarify the risks and merits of the plans, then the countermeasures for emergency cases.

Although that was more like the way modern society does things, it was passable.

But, even in this kind of era, the top would have to think about the state projects, while the bottom would have to think about the common family plannings.

However, although it was essential to create and operate an organization, there were surprisingly only a few people who understand how it worked and managed to execute it.

(I guess it was the correct choice to have left the job to those two...)

The abundant life experiences they possessed. It was something they had acquired over many years.

And for Ryouma, that was a very important treasure.

Genou had led the Iga clan for many years, his viewpoint was tough and accurate. It was also the same for Bolts

Looking at the results of the report, Ryouma thought his judgment was right. Since ,if

they felt pressure from their job, they would write more simple and beautifully worded reports. <TLN: When humans feel pressured, humans tend to make everything sound beautiful... It is a psychological fact(At least for me).>

(Well, I guess it was a bit funny... Besides, I have no confidence that I would be able to do it as well as them either...)

The face of the two men who desperately tried to make a report appeared inside Ryouma's mind which caused him to smile.

Ignoring his own lack of confidence.

"Fuuh... A bit more huh...?"

Ryouma who finished reading the last page sighed and passes the document to Laura who stands by his side.

"Yes, the last would be Simone-sama report."

"Roger that..."

Ryouma reviewed the document she handed over obediently with a tired expression.

Up until now, ever since he had returned to the Wortenia Peninsula, he had spent his time buried with office work.

However, despite his disgust with the job, he understands the importance of the task.

Ryouma was confident in Genou and Bolts' ability, but he didn't trust them unconditionally.

Confidence and trust were different things.

(How difficult...)

It might incite dissatisfaction if he didn't trust his subordinates and intervened too much, but humans would decay into corruption if they were completely neglected...

Such thing was the same whether it was in a family, company or society.

Then...

“As long you understand the essence, you can apply it, eh? I see...”

It was the words which Mikoshiba Kouichiro, his grandfather, always told Ryouma about. Because his grandfather had told him repeatedly it was stuck in his brain, and after he remembered it, Ryouma instinctively smiled.

Back in Japan, Ryouma had regarded his grandfather words as an old man nagging, but now that he was in another world, he felt thankful towards his grandfather's words that saved his life a lot of time.

(I never thought that I would make use of grandfather teachings here, though...)

Although it was troublesome, document works were the basis of an organization. One cannot manage an organization if one didn't take care of documents work.

Even in the martial arts world, it was important to repeatedly do the fundamentals/basics.

(Besides, my aim is beyond this after all...)

The moment he thought about his final goal and drew it in his mind, it sent a chill down his spine.

It was something that was impossible to do in peaceful Japan.

Every man would have at least dreamed of it once.

However, the possibility of such dream to come true was very low and close to that of being a daydream.

Furthermore, that was not the end of his ambitions. Ultimately, for Ryouma, that dream was only a stepping stone to achieve his hope.

(Well, let us not rush things... There is still a long road ahead...)

Ryouma deeply inhales his breath and slowly releases it in order to calm his mind.

The hidden ambitions and the fire of hatred that was still burning fiercely inside of his heart. If he was not careful, it might destroy him instead.

“Thank you for the hard work. I will immediately prepare some tea.”

“Ah, thank you... Shall we take a breather, then?”

He himself realized that he had lost concentration. Ryouma gently nodded his head in response to Sara’s words.

Paper was something very valuable in this world where parchments were more common, but it was not something that bothered the current Ryouma.

The securing of stable supply of paper was something he asked Simone to do as one of the highest priority together with gathering funds.

To succeed in securing that was truly a great achievement for Ryouma.

However... Ryouma’s expression became cloudy when he read the middle of the report.

(Almost everything went as planned, I wish we had gained a bit more... But well, I can’t have everything I guess, but still...)

In fact, there were many things that didn’t go according to Ryouma’s expectations.

The question was whether one should modify the goal to suit one’s results or ignore the report because it didn’t go as one’s wanted.

Ryouma reads the papers further while creasing his frowned eyebrows.

Among the jobs handed over to Simone, the part of securing iron, woods, and most importantly paper had generally yielded satisfactory results.

Creating a spy network was also proceeding smoothly, with how he manages to have detailed information agents in the three eastern countries within the western continent.

Simone had managed high achievements. A good result that was almost perfect.

That’s right, except for one thing.

After he drinks his tea, Ryouma sinks his body on his chair while deep in thought.

(We only gained half of the planned money... Well, it was not part of the money needed for the immediate use and with the trade going well, we can cover it, but...)

It was the top priority order he had given Simone. It was the fundraising for the development of the peninsula, but the result didn't go as he had expected.

The amount stated in the document was about 300 million baht.

It was only about one-third of the amount Ryouma had expected when he met Simone before he went to the Zalda Kingdom. And the problem was that there was no reason being written as to why it had ended up like that.

(I don't think this is because of Simone management skills...)

In fact, Simone's abilities were outstanding.

At first, her firm had only two galleon trade ships, now it had eight moving around doing trades.

With the new commercial treaty between ErnestGora and the three eastern countries nearwithin the Wortenia Peninsula, her influence would rise.

Although it was not a free trade agreement like the one from the modern world, the agreement had made business much easier. And with ErnestGora and Mist Kingdoms as the leading forces, the production, import and export would greatly increase for all four countries.

A great business opportunity.

However, competition between merchants would intensify at the same time.

And because she produces excellent profits, the problem was not because Simone had no business talent.

But if that was the case, for Ryouma, the problem would've been more serious.

Words of advice from the Zalda King Julianus the first emerged inside Ryouma's mind.

(I feel something bad is going to happen...)

Whether or not it was related, there was no proof.

However, Ryouma's intuition alarm began to ring.

Perhaps, Simone deliberately didn't list the problem...

(Whether she didn't write it or was unable to write it... I need to confirm this directly with Simone...)



The hand of the clock hanging on the wall pointed at 1:00 am early morning. It was not the appropriate time to call a young woman, but he had no choice.

Because he felt that the problem he was about to face would become a turning point as to how he would move in the future.



(I wonder... Is this about 'that' matter?)

In spite of the sudden notice, Simone didn't show any surprised expression. Although she described everything in detail, only that matter she didn't write down.

Considering Ryouma's personality, it would be easy to predict that he would come to check personally.

(But still, to be called at this time... I wonder if I've underestimated him... But I guess, the time is just right. I also had something I wanted to ask him directly...)

Simone was about to propose a meeting after dawn, but Ryouma seemed to have paid more attention to the matter than she had expected.

However, although she had anticipated the meeting to some extent, the young woman still worried about her physical appearance after being disturbed from her sleep. Since she didn't have enough time to set her hair, she used her hands to fix them while feeling concerned about the shape.

"Simone Christoph has arrived. May I bring her in?"

A guard who was guarding the office door announced Simone's arrival. A young soldier who still had some childishness on his face.

However, his behavior was that of a perfect soldier.

(I guess he also taught manners to these children, eh...)

Of course, it may be somewhat inferior when they were being compared to the servants working in the other nobles' households, but in Simone's point of view who

had interacted with many nobles, their act was sufficient enough

On top of that, these soldiers, despite being young they were more superior.

All the soldiers protecting the office of the Wortenia Peninsula's ruler had magic arts capabilities. And when it comes to guarding the gate, it was better to choose the loyal ones.

"It's fine, bring her in."

A voice sounding like a beautiful bell could be heard.

The door of the office opened slowly, then Simone stepped forward.

Ryouma smiling face that she didn't see for a while appeared in front of her eyes.



(Just like usual... Like dogs that don't want to leave their master's side...)

Behind him, like a shadow, the twin sisters with golden and silver hair were standing, an emotion that was akin to that of jealousy began to appear inside the depths of her mind as Simone showed a bitter smile.

That was because Mikoshiba Ryouma never made any advances to Simone, not even once...

"I'm sorry for calling you in the middle of the night like this..."

"My, I do not mind..."

「夜中にすまなかったな」

「いえ、お気になさらずに」



She then sits down on the sofa following Ryouma's direction. This was the only expensive furniture he had bought from Simone, the comfort was exquisite.

(Geez... I can't be like this, I need to concentrate, this is my work...)

Simone then directed serious eyes while fixing her dress as if trying to hide her dissatisfaction.

"I see, it seems my decision to ask directly is correct."

"Yes, I thought it would be best for us to meet as soon as possible... But I never thought I would be called this soon..."

However, there was no feeling of sarcasm from those words, despite Ryouma had called her during the dead of the night. In fact, Simone wanted to praise Ryouma's fast judgment.

"I'm sorry for causing this kind of inconvenience, but well I was also at a loss regarding what to do, but then I remembered the Zalda King's advice..."

"Advice is it?"

"Indeed, I'm not sure whether or not it was related to the problem here but..."

A question mark appeared above Simone's head after she heard Ryouma's words.

"May I know what is it?"

The advice of the Zalda King, Julianus, who was known as a mediocre king.

Regarding the upcoming battles, the evaluation of Julianus within the Rozeria Kingdom can be said as 'cold'.

In fact, Simone herself felt doubtful with the King's ability.

(In the first place, it was weird that he immediately agreed to the peace agreement and obediently withdrew... As soon as the battle was over, the initial plan collapsed...)

Such incoherent decision.

At least Simone felt that way.

However, Ryouma interrupted her thoughts.

“I know what Simone wanted to hear... Lione-san also had asked the question a lot of time. But, I’m sorry that I have to postpone talking about that until later... Beside Genou and Bolts would also demand an explanation as well anyway...”

Since he said that much, Simone didn’t have any choice but to nod her head even though she felt dissatisfied.

“Now then, time is limited. Shall we begin the talk?”

Towards Ryouma’s question, Simone slowly opened her mouth.

That day, the discussion between Simone and Ryouma lasted until dawn.

Chapter 3

Return 3

Money/Gold. It was an all-around weapon in civilized societies that went beyond certain constant standard. *<TLN: By context, it is Gold that falls into such category, because since ancient times and until today. we can still use it as a currency weapon... But I will use Money for the entire explanation>*

Money can be turned into foods, clothing and shelter/residence. In times it can be turned into knowledge and depending on the situation it would even rule over life and death of a person.

It was the so-called ultimate power.

(Such things didn't change even in a different world... Well in that sense, I can feel relieved that this world is not an open world with no currency.)

In extreme cases, no one knew whether or not there was another world with people primitive enough, that they didn't know the term of currency.

Because being in this world itself can be said as absurd as a fairy tale.

Resting his cheek against one of his hand, Ryouma listened to the progress of the meeting while looking at the gold coins in his other hand.

(This does has a nice touch...)

A certain weight, characteristic feeling of gold.

Naturally, he lifted his lips after he felt such peculiar sensation on his hand.

Although Gold coins were heavier than bills, and they were inconvenient to carry, there was a sense of fulfillment in holding them that paper money didn't have.

"I don't understand really well... In other words, the aim of the both of you was gold from the start?"

A conference meeting room. It was a place where the ruler of Wortenia Peninsula and his aides surrounded a huge ebony roundtable.

The one who opened her mouth was Lione who had kept silent during the meeting, but the moment Simone ended her speech, she was the first one to open her mouth.

Ryouma smiled bitterly since he could notice dark anger hidden behind her pupil.

(Wah, her mood turned bad... I guess I've expected that reaction from Lione...)

The problem was the reason why she was angry.

As a mercenary Lione could understand that reason. And as a field commander, she could also understand that such aim was also right. But, the problem was she wished that Ryouma trusted her a little bit more.

And not only Lione held such thoughts.

(Though she herself seems to have calmed down considerably...)

Otherwise, Lione would've flared up seriously right now.

And if she was that short-tempered, she would've left a long time ago.

"Lione-san, your words, I think it was a bit wrong. It is true that Ryouma has given me the duty to gather funds and supplies. But for him, that was not everything."

Lione frowned after she heard Simone calm argument.

Probably because she realized something from Simone's words.

(Well, it's not like what she said is a lie...)

At least, Ryouma never told Lione a lie.

Certainly, he didn't say everything in details, but he cannot be blamed for deceiving either.

If there was a reason for Ryouma to be blamed, then there was only one. And the only

reason was that he didn't explain everything properly.

"I see, then what the young master told us at the beginning, that he wanted to demonstrate our prowess to the neighboring countries and nobles, while buying time for Zalda to find a breakthrough..."

Sitting next to Lione, Bolts who was silent all this time opened his mouth.

"Regarding that, Ryouma-sama didn't lie. As a matter of fact, those objectives were essential for us."

"It's just that he didn't say everything, is it?"

"Briefly speaking, that is right..."

"I see... That means it was not important to tell us everything, eh?"

Bolts then directed a meaningful line of sight to Ryouma.

"No no, I have no intention of keeping it secret."

"I see... Which means just like Simone-san had said. It was because we didn't ask about it in the first place, is it?"

Bolts scuffled his hair while shaking his head sideways in an exaggerated manner.

"Well, fine then. I'm not convinced, but certainly, I didn't inquire about it in the first place..."

Probably because she finally understood Ryouma's intentions. Lione let it pass despite feeling distrusted.

"Well then, how about we talk about it from the start. That was the reason why the boy had gathered all of us here this early in the morning, no? And besides, I also have something that I wanted to ask. About various things..."

Following Lione's gaze, Ryouma shrugged his shoulders.

Certainly, there were many things she would want to ask.

Because she felt that Ryouma himself avoided proper explanation.

“The things you want to hear, is it about the matter with King Julianus?”

It was the problem that Lione had kept asking for an answer, and also the problem that Ryouma had kept avoiding to answer.

“That’s right, I was wondering, just what is it that that old man told you, right before we returned back?”

“What’s with that question?”

Bolts who cannot follow the conversation stared at Lione’s face questioningly. Or rather, everyone in the room did the same.

Their line of sight focused on her all at once. However, Lione applied silent pressure while kept starring at Ryouma without averting her gaze.

“You can’t go and say there’s nothing to say, alright? After all, your behavior that night was unusual...”

Her tone of voice demanded a proper explanation. It came out after enduring Ryouma’s attitude all this time.

(Well, fine then...)

It was a long story. And also pretty complicated too.

Speaking frankly, Ryouma was troubled as to where he should start talking.

“Let’s see... I guess I should talk starting from that...”

Ryouma opened his mouth after sighing deeply.

“King Julianus, rather than just the previous war, he told me that every wars happening

on this western continent was the work and intentions of a certain group of people...”

The things that came out from Ryouma’s mouth was as shocking as a bomb explosion.
Because of the unexpected words, Lione was looking stunned.

“Wha-? What do you mean by that?”



Not only Lione, almost everyone else also stared at Ryouma with a surprised expression. Only two people didn't show any surprises, and that were the Marfisto sisters.

"Well, at first, I could not believe it either..."

It was a very natural reaction. Ryouma himself would doubt the sanity and wonder how he should interact with people who believe in it immediately, if he told them.

A heavy silence dominated the room.

Everyone gazed at Ryouma without saying any words.

From the others' point of view, Ryouma's words could only be regarded as delusion or words that came out from someone insane.

"Well, let us hear young master explain everything until the end first."

Finally, Bolts opened his mouth.

Although he himself felt the same as the other, he seems to have decided that he should listen to everything first.

Doubt and suspicion clearly floating in his eyes.

"My bad, Bolts... Now then, let's us continue the story..."

After confirming that everyone had regained their calmness, Ryouma opened his mouth once again.

"Let me say this first... I never had the intention of swallowing the story King Julianus told me about. After all, it was a fairly crazy story to begin with..."

Everyone surrounding the roundtable nodded deeply in silence without saying anything.

It was also the same for Sara and Laura who had heard about it first from Ryouma before anyone else.

“That was why, even after I heard this story from King Julianus, I didn’t tell anyone... To be honest, I doubted that old man’s sanity when I heard it. However, as soon as I got back, and had the time to think about it myself, I thought that there might be some truth in this story. At least on the Ortomea side, the people who wanted to prolong the war are not just a few...”

“What does that meant?”

“First, Joshua Belharres...”

It might be because he had the geographical advantages going for him but, it was the truth that Joshua Belharres had defended against the Ortomea Empire for a year.

But thinking about it calmly, such thing was unnatural.

He used the basic strategy of disturbing the enemy’s supplies transport. However, Ortomea should’ve been able to anticipate that well enough.

Why didn’t they put any countermeasures? No, naturally they should’ve put many measures against Joshua tactics.

Yet under such circumstances, Joshua had managed to attain a lot of success.

Of course, it didn’t mean that everything he did was a success. But still, he managed to slow down the Ortomean invasion.

Ryouma himself thinks that Joshua’s ability was excellent.

However, when he thought about it more calmly, that alone won’t be enough to attain such success.

“In other words, there was an information provider on the Ortomea side?”

“Making friends from amongst the enemy ranks is a basic strategy. In this regard, Genou and Ryuusai would’ve been more familiar with it, no?”

Towards Lione’s words, Ryouma turned his gaze to Genou and co.

“I see... That might be true but... As far as Sakuya’s report go, no one in Zalda should’ve possessed such ability, though?”

Although they nodded their head, Genou and his clan members still could not understand fully.

If the Zalda Kingdom had an excellent intelligence network, they wouldn't have ended up being cornered in the first place.

Being unable to grasp the Empire's movement in itself was a proof that the Zalda Kingdom didn't have such resources and even if they did, it would've been a very small organization.

"Right, that was why I thought everything was because of Joshua's skills..."

Skill was something very important in a war, but that was about it.

To win a war, one needs to build a precise and huge information network, and one needs a lot of excellent people working as assistant staff.

And above all else, it was very important for them to have high loyalty and a sense of duty.

Such things should not be available in the Zalda Kingdom who had exhausted its strength.

The only people who had such quality might be only the two people, General Belharres and Joshua who succeeded him, who waged an unconventional warfare after looking at the difference in power between two countries.

"However, that thought seemed to be a mistake..."

When the war was over, Ryouma had asked Joshua about it directly, but he said the spy he had only told him about general various information and didn't indicate that there was a betrayer within the Ortomea Empire.

Of course, Ryouma could not take Joshua words for granted either, after all he should not be able to create an excellent spy network under such dire situations.

If that was the case then...

"Someone in the Ortomea side, who is close to the high command leaked the information intentionally?"

“If you think about it more calmly, the way the Ortomea’s army moved certainly was unnatural...”

Towards Lione’s words, Ryouma nodded his head.

Compared to the strategy during the time they killed General Belharres, the Empire movement afterwards lacked precision.

“At the beginning, I thought there is someone who wants to pull down Sardina’s standing on the Empire side... After all, internal conflicts for a leadership is very possible...”

Sardina Eizenheit is the eldest daughter of the Emperor, and also Emperor Lionel’s favorite child.

His confidence in Sardina’s ability might be even above the crown prince who was her elder brother.

Thus the likelihood that someone was trying to pull Sardina’s legs was very likely.

Ryouma’s words were only based on guesses, but because it had enough logic, people felt such scenario was possible after listening to it.

“Wait a moment. Even if it was just a guess of the young master, this story is about if there was someone betraying the Ortomea Empire during the war, right? Does it has anything to do with what King Julianus had said?”

Bolts butted in with a question when he heard the arranged story.

And the question was something right to ask...

“Well, Bolts’ doubt is natural. Certainly, the current story is only possible if there is a conflict within the Ortomea Empire itself. However, you will be convinced if you listen to me until the end...”

“Is this regarding the amount of money Simone managed to get?”

“Yes, I ordered Simone to earn at least a billion baht. By making use of this war, that is...”

“A billion... Such amount...”

Ryouma talked about the amount as if it was nothing, but Lione who didn't hear about it in advance felt surprised.

It was close to 10 billions in term of Japanese Yen.

It was the amount of money normally someone wouldn't be able to attain in their lifetime.

However, Ryouma talked about it as if it was nothing.

“Well, it's not that surprising really... After all, such an amount won't be enough to fund my final goal...”

As a matter of fact, the more money Ryouma have right now, the better.

One billion baht was only enough for the maintenance and development of the Wortenia Peninsula. However, he could not perform any expansion with that amount alone.

“But still, is it really possible for you guys to be able to get that money? Seriously?”

Lione's skeptical gaze was directed at the surroundings.

It was good to have a goal, but it would be meaningless if it was an impossible goal.

And, thinking about it with common sense, it was quite difficult for the current Ryouma to earn that amount of money.

However, Simone opened her mouth as if waiting for such question.

“Yes, if everything had gone according to the plan, it was possible for us to get that amount of money...”

“According to the plan?”

“Yes, Zalda and Ortomea. It would be possible if we made use of the war between those two countries.”

Lione tilted her head in confusion after listening to Lione's explanation.

(Well, it was natural for her to not understand... In this world, it was not common for someone to understand war emergency economic demands... But if that is the case, then...)

Ryouma realized that his guess was highly possible. And such thoughts suggests the possibility that someone had the same knowledge as him.

"As expected... I have no choice but to start to move on, huh..."

Ryouma muttered those words with low voice while Simone explained the method she used in the conference room.

Chapter 4

Return 4

Ortomea Empire.

As a champion of the central part of the western continent, the capital was the seat of powerful people who controlled such a country.

Although its ambitions for conquests had been put to a halt starting with the death of Gaies, but for the commoners, it was still the same as usual.

Evening in the imperial capital. Prostitutes and drunken people were walking around...

(Damn... I'm a bit late...)

Because the work in the imperial palace took more time than expected, the appointed hour had already passed since a long time ago, thus the man immediately headed towards the red district on the northern part of the capital.

"Hey Onii-san over there... How about spending some time with me for a bit? You can do it with 100 baht."

"How about me? 75 baht is okay... How about some service?"

Ignoring the prostitutes who smell the money in him, the man accelerates his steps further.

Although he didn't have to hurry since he already told the other side that there's the possibility of being late. However, the man's legs didn't stop walking fast because of his innate serious personality.

Maybe because of feeling irritated by the man's cold attitude, the women began to forcefully grab hold of his cloak.

The man intentionally frowned from the prostitute vulgar fragrance mixed with the

smell of sweat and tobacco.

Although comparing prostitutes with normal citizens was not wrong, but for Japanese people who are used to bathing every day, doing such low-class prostitutes was out of mind.

To be honest, not all men are fine with any woman.

After the man forcefully shook off the woman's hand, he advances his feet without looking back. The booing voice of a woman can be heard as the man kept walking.

Due to the man forcefully shaking off the woman, she almost tripped over.

(In a way, this is because I could not use a horse... But well, I've told that person that I'm going to be late beforehand, but...)

Regrettably, despite that it could solve all of his troubles, no matter what status one had, one cannot use horse-drawn carriages or a horse in the red-light district north of the capital.

It was similar to the red-light district during Edo period, with the exception of doctors, they could not use normal transportation at the time.

(Geez... Every time I come here, I can't feel calm down...)

He did not mind the liveliness and the hustle-bustle, but that also depends on the degree of how much.

Up until now, he felt irritated by how lively it was. However, because he understands that the place was the best spot for his meetings with his colleagues, he didn't mind about it.

After all, it would be drawing too much attention if they met at the normal places.

Before long he saw a mansion with an impressive gate that could be mistaken as something belonging to some noble.

This house, protected by a high fence and a strong gatekeeper was the home of the finest prostitute in the imperial capital.

"Excuse me, dear customer. We would like to confirm your membership card. Or has

someone introduced you to this place?”

Noticing the man, the gatekeeper greeted the man.

No matter what position one had, everyone received the same treatment, and the gatekeeper seemed to have gone through a proper education.

“Is this fine?”

The man handed over a card to the gatekeeper as usual.

This was an interaction that had already been repeated many times.

And, the gatekeeper should not have forgotten the face of the man who was a member of the same organization. Although it was not a bad thing to use a face recognition, it was never bad to emphasize on security, considering the importance of this mansion.

At least such a cautious attitude was the most important since many secrets needed to be kept hidden here.

“Yes, with this you may enter. Please enjoy your time here...”

After confirming the number and names written on the surface, the guard inserts the card to the equipment placed inside the station.

After confirming the information displayed on the crystal he nodded lightly to his comrade.

Then the metal gate opened slowly inward while making a heavy noise.

“Everyone has been waiting. Saitou-sama...”

He replied to those words with a small nod and Saitou immediately entered the mansion.

The man’s name was Saitou Eimei. It was the same man who was the aide of the first princess of the Ortomea Empire, and the vice commander of the Succubus Night chivalric order.



Saitou who entered the mansion was guided by the maid, and went up the stairs after passing the hall illuminated with glittering chandeliers.

“I’m sorry for being late...”

He was on the third floor of the building. Entering one of the secluded rooms, Saitou lowered his head immediately after he saw the men sitting on the sofa.

Two men were sitting on the sofa.

There was no problem with one of them. Because Saitou visited this place to meet him.

However, after he saw an unexpected face, cold sweat ran down his spine.

“It’s fine, also no need for the greetings... Now then, since we are all already gathered, shall we begin the talks?”

Around the late twenties to mid-thirties. One might wonder if he was the same age as Saitou. Trimmed short black hair with sunburn skin. Compared to Saitou, he possessed a body physique twice larger. The man sits on the sofa showing a refreshing smile towards Saitou.

“Carter-san... What’s going on here?”

While sitting down on the sofa, Saitou spoke to the white blonde man sitting next to him.

“Saitou-kun. It’s fine...”

Being gazed with a sharp gaze, Saitou instinctively swallowed the words that were about to come out.

‘Sit silently.’ As if his eyes told him those words. the person was James Carter the owner of this mansion and also the leader of an information network stretching around the Empire... Saitou fell silent obeying the man who was rumored to be a former member of the United Kingdom of Great Britain’s intelligence department.

<TLN: WTF? A former member of MI6?>

(What's going on here... As expected, he's here because of the invasion of the Zalda Kingdom... But, I never expected that director Kikukawa would show up...)

An unspeakable uneasiness started to appear inside Saitou's heart. As his body remembers how he had been reprimanded by him, Saitou could not calm down. However, if he was going to get banished, there was no need for this man to inform Saitou personally.

(It can't be... Exiled... No, wait...)

It was a feeling of fear greater than when he had an audience with the Emperor.

"No need to be that tense. Saitou-kun... I didn't come here to reprimand you..."

"Haa, but, then, why?"

Looking at the smiling Kikukawa, Saitou felt doubtful.

He could not just obediently believe that he had no reasons for being here.

Although they both were the same age, Kikukawa was one of the top ten inside the organization. Saitou himself had the authority as the head of the operation element, but that rank was only around intermediate rank within the organization.

If one was to compare to the situation in a company, the difference in rank between them was like a board director meeting with a section chief.

The fact that such a man appears here meant a state emergency.

However, despite Saitou's concerns, Kikukawa opened his mouth with a calm expression.

"No no, because now that I've been appointed as the contact point within the Empire side, I've been positioned in the imperial capital for now..."

Kikukawa smiled as if he got a stroke of luck.

(I see... If that is the case then it is normal for him to be here, but...)

Privileged to conduct direct dealings with the country. They were merchants with huge influence and capital power, that could influence the administration of a country.

Remembering that Kikukawa was an influential merchant with certain political ties, Saitou found himself unable to relax.

However, if what he said was true then Kikukawa should've been in the imperial capital for a few years.

(But, why suddenly...)

Maybe because he could feel Saitou's questioning gaze, Kikukawa shrugged his shoulders.

"Nothing really important, I was just simply in the imperial capital, and as a result, I had been ordered to deliver a message of appreciation from everyone... The business people also having a free time, because the invasion troops had returned home..."

"That is..."

Saitou felt like he needed to respond with something, but was unable to say anything, thus he showed an awkward expression.

While looking happy at Saitou's expression, Kikukawa continued speaking.

"First of all, I would like to express my appreciation for your work. Especially you, Saitou-kun, I would like to thank you very much. Because you managed to control that Princess Sardina, our plan could proceed well..."

No matter how much Ortomea Empire lost or won, the war could have ended easily.

However, for the organization who tried to make a profit out of the war, such situation was not convenient.

To keep a subtle balance, Saitou had intentionally leaked the marching route of the troops to delay the Ortomean invasion. It was not easy for Saitou to do that as someone who was among the central people in the war with the Zalda Kingdom. Had he been

suspected, his head would have rolled on the ground.

“Well, it must be hard to be the partner of that wild horse princess, no? After all, that blitzkrieg strategy, it was her who came up with it...”

Princess Sardina was not stupid.

Although she didn't leave any impressive result as of late, it was her strategy and planning capabilities that defeated General Belharres, who was known as the Guardian God of the Notiz plain.

Had Saitou not leaked the information properly, the Zalda Kingdom would've disappeared a year ago.

“No... after all, they didn't know that the magic arts of submission placed on me had been lifted...”

In response to Kikukawa's question, Saitou shakes his head.

Magic art of submission. It was the magic art performed upon the human summoned to this world. Or it may be better to call it a curse instead...

By using such magic art, they forced the terrified people from another world into the middle of a war.

“Certainly. They won't doubt you unless they found out that the submission magic has been lifted... And of course, that is our intention from the start as well...”

Saying those words, Kikukawa lifted his lips and laughed.

Normally, there were no magic arts capable of unlocking such technique arbitrarily. To begin with, people summoned from another world such as Saitou and the others, they were being regarded as human-shaped monsters. At the very least, their appreciation was that the people from another world were not fellow humans with the same status.

Of course, there were some open-minded people with a different thought.

However, most people in this world thought of the humans from another world as a convenient tool, that they can exchange words with.

Thus from the beginning, they had no choice such as freedom.

That was why, unlike the usual magic art for slaves, the ones used to control otherworlders was a powerful magic art that needs catalysts to perform.

A spell that causes pain if one were to have a rebellious thought, and might kill if one were to make a rebellious movement. Magic arts that guaranteed safety for the summoner.

Such magic arts was the reason why Ortomea Empire can easily give authority to people like Sudou and Saitou.

It was a carrot and stick policy. However, no matter how great the magic arts were, there will be always a gap to break.

“But still, they would still suspect you if you wander too much... Furthermore, despite having the chance to murder those guys to get your revenge, you managed to control yourself, your performance is worthy of respect. Judging from that point of view, you’ve done well.”

When a beast was freed from its shackles, usually they would immediately bare their fangs. And people were also the same.

Even if one knows that one might die...

That was why people like Saitou was necessary.

“Because nothing would change with only two people dead...”

Sweet thoughts of revenge. There were only a few people who can endure such temptations

His ability to keep leaking information to the Zalda Kingdom without the others finding out was excellent.

In his eyes, dwelled murderous intent and hatred.

The darkness that was hidden inside Saitou appeared a little bit.

“I know what had happened to your lover, I also feel sorry. However, please be more patient. With the war this time, we have managed to gather an amount close enough to our target.”

Hearing Kikukawa words, Saitou lowered his head in silence.

Even if one gets words of comforts, the things that had been lost won't return...

(Preservation, huh? But until when...)

For almost ten years, Saitou had been crying blood and drinking mud. It was all for the sake of one wish.

Maybe because he felt such feelings from Saitou, Kikukawa continued his talk.

"With the successful result this time, we managed to obtain a considerable amount of money. So, the other day, the committee decided to set out a new strategy."

There Kikukawa stopped talking and stared at Saitou.

It was a big turning point even for Kikukawa. No, it was a big turning point for everyone within the organization.

"I want you to take a new job..."

The deep voice reached Saitou's ears.

"A job?"

"That's right, the crown prince and Sardina. I want you to set those two against each others..."

Realizing the meaning of those words, Saitou expression turns ugly and distorted.

Chapter 5

Return5

Night dominated the neighborhood when all the prostitutes and their customers had entered the world of dreams, inside a room on the corner of the mansion hall, one man was still waiting for someone.

“Fumu... The meeting seems to have dragged on considerably, eh?”



Showing a wry smile, the man crosses his legs while looking at the clock hanging on the walls. And slowly he picked up the glass filled with bright red liquid from the table beside his sofa.

The moment the rich aroma spread throughout his mouth, the man nodded deeply satisfied and swallow the liquid slowly.

Blissful sensation wrapped his entire body. It was the only time the man who was always drenched red with schemes and violence could feel such relaxation.

While he was enjoying the taste of the drink, the sound of knocking on the door could be heard, he immediately returns his expression to normal and allowed the person to enter the room.

Such was the manner of a boss who was about to meet with his subordinates.

“Sudou-san, I’ve finished talking with Saitou-kun for the time being...”

“Thank you for your hard work. It seems you’ve taken quite a bit of time, did something happen?”

After the man took a glance at Kikukawa who entered the room, the man showed his usual smile on his face.

Hearing such words from the man, Kikukawa directed his eyes at the clock hanging on the wall and sighed.

It took one hour more time than he initially thought.

“I’m very sorry. It took me quite a while... But well, looking from his point of view, I can understand his feelings.”

Pain from losing a family. Such loss would give pain and sorrow to a person.

If it was from sickness or accident, then people might be able to move on relatively easy.

However, the story would be different if the pain was caused by losing a loved one because of other people using force.

Similar flame of intense hatred was held by many people belonging to the organization.

Even Saitou held such feelings despite how cool and cold he was on the surface.

It would be understandable if he felt restless as the day of revenge comes closer while serving the enemy he hated so much.

“I see... Well, it is natural for him to feel that way...”

“Indeed...”

Sudou beckoned Kikukawa who said those words with a bitter smile.

“Alright then, thank you for your hard work. Kikukawa-kun. Don’t just stand there, come sit down and have a drink...”

Sudou’s attitude won’t change even if he was working as a senior executive of the organization. Speaking frankly it was his nature to be like that.

And on the other hand, Kikukawa took his attitude as a matter of course.

“Thank you, well then, please excuse me...”

He sat down on the sofa opposite to Sudou, and lift the cup from the desk.

It was a silver cup carved with detailed artistry.

Kikukawa slowly drinks the liquid inside the cup after enjoying the carving.

“This is quite good alcohol huh... It was quite a waste to drink this with just us, men...”

Rich fragrance entered Kikukawa nostrils.

The drink was wine made from good grapes. The wine they had was around ten years old.

“Of course, it was a famous product I bought from the south, you know? Well, It is certainly true that it would taste much better if we drank this with a woman...”

Enjoying a feast while being surrounded by beautiful women. It was something every

man at least had dreamed once.

Furthermore, in this world where amusement was limited, such entertainment was one of the few things that could be considered as such.

“Indeed that would be a nice suggestion but, we’re not yet done with our work...”

Hearing Kikukawa saying those words while giving the documents to him, Sudou shrugged his shoulders like a father listening to his children being stubborn.

“How diligent... But well, that was why you’ve been appointed as executive despite being young...”

“That is the report this time...”

“I see I see, I guess this is to be expected based on his character...”

After roughly skimming through the documents handed to him, Sudou lifted one of his eyebrows.

Inside the reports were written the movement of Mikoshiba Ryouma, Simone Christoph, and her collaborators.

“Because I was being warned by Sudou-san beforehand, I managed to prevent some serious damage to our profits this time. But still, that Mikoshiba Ryouma... He’s quite the crafty one...”

Zalda and Ortomea.

The war between the two countries had increased the prices of goods in the entire continent.

In a sense, it was natural for that to happen.

A war consumes a large amount of goods, which was the best condition for merchants to perform their activity, and if the consumption was drifted upward without being balanced with the supplies, the prices would rise without control.

It was some basic economy that anyone could understand if they used their brain a little bit.

The difference was how much you can understand and how much you can make use of such situation...

“Well, I guess so, he is crafty because he is young after all...”

In this world, it was questionable as to how many people could move like Mikoshiba Ryouma...

Most people can't even use the opportunity even when it presented itself in front of them.

“Apart from the reinforcement mission he took, I've never thought that he would dig into the Ortomea Empire who was his enemy. Above else, to think that Christoph firm had some channels to compete ruthlessly against the firms with political ties in the imperial capital...”

“To be frank, he seems to only know about his surroundings. It's just that his luck is considerably good, and he also knows how to make use of it. He's quite the promising young man, isn't it? “

In response to Sudou who laughed hard, Kikukawa shrugged his shoulders.

Certainly, one cannot deny Sudou's evaluation of Ryouma.

Indeed Mikoshiba Ryouma was someone who was loved by the Goddess of destiny and he seemed to know well how to make use of such things.

However, he might become an obstacle that the organization could not ignore...

“This is not something we can laugh about, you know? Do you know how much profit we might lose if I didn't put pressure on their business partner? If that had happened, then...”

“It was nice that we could prevent it before the prices collapsed, wasn't it?”

Lifting the value of goods was similar to sending air to a balloon. And balloon with too much air in it could burst easily with just a little poking around using a needle.

At the very least, the organization wanted to be the one who decided the timing when the balloon burst...

And in the meantime, they also earned profits while maintaining the high prices with balance.

“Geez... Seriously...”

Since Sudou was someone who wouldn't change his attitude, Kikukawa could only shake his head and breathed out a small sigh.

Had counter-measures been delayed, the organization wouldn't be able to reach their target. If that happens, they would need to revise their plan.

A plan that the organization spent years preparing. A chill runs through Kikukawa's back thinking what if that scenario had happened.

If it did, it meant the organization's goal getting farther away.

“Well, I certainly don't want that to happen... That is why I told you to be careful and watch his movements, no?”

Without breaking his attitude, Sudou expressed some grudges in his words.

“I know that... However, since there is a lot of risk coming from him, why don't we do something more?”

Indeed, Sudou had informed the organization about the existence of Mikoshiba Ryouma. He had warned them to be careful and watch Ryouma's movements.

However, he did that only just to be sure.

That was why the organization didn't take Sudou's information seriously.

If one were to question who should take responsibility for such mistake, it would be the upper echelons who didn't listen to Sudou's words seriously.

Kikukawa himself also understood that. However, he also wanted to voice his dissatisfaction.

Towards such Kikukawa, Sudou only keeps talking without changing his expression.

“Anyway, the results won't change much either way. Even if I had predicted these

movements by the time I gave you the information on that man, I cannot imagine how much the organization would have believed in my words. And if we strengthened the surveillance of that man poorly, the result might turn worse instead.”

Who would’ve thought that this kind of situation might happen. It was impossible to predict everything accurately.

Also, even if the organization took Sudou’s information seriously and strengthened the surveillance of Mikoshiba Ryouma, they still won’t be able to stop his movements.

Although the organization had a huge power, enough to make a dramatic influence within countries, there were no choices other than to spread their power carefully, because there were two gigantic enemies equal to them, namely Kirtantia and the Empire.

“Well, for now, we should keep an eye on him...”

“That is the intention of me and the others for now... But then, we still have no information regarding them at all... Recently, I’ve set up a request in the Guild, but I was declined with them saying that they had their hands full with monsters...”

Hearing Kikukawa’s words, Sudou narrowed his eyes and asked.

“Hohou... There’s still no information regarding the Peninsula?”

“That’s right since I was refused by the Guild, I’d picked some people from the eastern part of the continent and sent them to the Peninsula, but I’ve not yet received any report back from them. I’ve hired some people in the fortress located south of the Peninsula as contact person, but all of them said they had become prey to the monsters. Recently, the rumors of disappearances have spread, because of that the adventurers and mercenaries have intentionally avoided work that is related to the Peninsula.”

“I see... I guess they are intentionally blocking information from leaking, isn’t it?”

“As expected, Sudou-san also thought of that?”

It was normal for people to rely on the Guild when it comes to dealing with the monsters.

Of course, some influential aristocrats might have powerful vassals to deal with it

themselves, but it was weird that Mikoshiba Ryouma, an upstart noble, didn't rely on the Guild at all...

The only possibility as for why he didn't do that, was because he didn't want any information related to the Peninsula to go out...

"What should we do? Should I get the people among the hunting dog to perform a raid on the peninsula?"

"Fumu... Moving the S rank is it?"

The S rank, officially they were known as the strongest force the Guild had.

They were individuals boasting the strength of thousand men, and also the best fighting group within the organization.

Just by sending 20 of them to the Wortenia Peninsula could be enough to reduce it to ashes.

(I have no objections when it comes to killing him but...)

It would be easy for the organization to just kill him, but for Sudou, such things had no style...

Sudou kept silent for a while then he shook his head.

"It would be better for us to not make a move on him. It would be no good for us to move the hound dogs and show some opening to the Knights of the Church."

If the hounds were the trump cards of the organization, there was also another one belonging to the light god religious organization, known as the Church's Knights.

The fighting power of both can be said as nearly equal.

It would be a dangerous decision to move a fighting force and showing an opening against such antagonistic opponent.

"If that's the case, then what should we do?"

After his suggestion having been rejected, Kikukawa words sounded sharp.

However, he immediately raised his eyebrows the moment he heard Sudou's words.

"Let's see... How about we left him alone for now?"

To the unexpected words, Kikukawa was at a loss for words.

"Are you serious? I'm well aware of the danger caused by that man. To leave him alone is..."

"Well, certainly he is a dangerous man, but I think if we can use him properly, then we can use him as a shield... Especially when he reeks of a smell similar to us..."

Kikukawa leaned his head unintentionally towards those meaningful words.

But after a brief silence, only one answer comes to his mind.

"Shield? As a decoy against Kirtantia and the people of the church, is it?"

"That's right, the more he blocks the information, the more those cultists and the Kirtantia people doubt our relations with them. Furthermore, looking at his movements, it looked like as if we had been working together... With that, it would be impossible for our enemies to wipe away any suspicions. Along with their suspicions, they won't be able to stay silent then... Which in turn would make them meddle around with Mikoshiba Ryouma. See? What do you think? He's a good shield for us, no?"

"But, won't that let him do however he pleases as well?"

"That is why we need to let him do whatever he pleases to make this work well..."

Sudou didn't think that Mikoshiba Ryouma had the whole picture of the organization inside his mind, but he should at least be aware of the existence of a group that thinks just like him.

In reverse, if an organization using the same method as him appeared in front of his eyes.

He would also place a priority when it comes to counter-measures.

“So we meddle with his priorities, huh?”

“Right, he should not find any difficulties in making such a judgment...”

Just like how people won't care if their relatives are the victims of an earthquake when their own house is currently on fire.

“I see... That is indeed not bad...”

Listening to Sudou's plan, Kikukawa showed an admiration.

A medicine could be a fatal poison if it was not handled properly.

Conversely, whether it would become a medicine or a poison, it depended on the people handling it.

In contrast to Kikukawa who wanted to eliminate the poison called Mikoshiba Ryouma, Sudou's plan was something that made use of him as a medicine instead. It clearly showed the difference in experience between Kikukawa and Sudou.

“I understand. I will tell Sudou-san's plan to the representatives then. But I'm sure the representatives will not oppose this plan.”

“Is that so? Well, I will leave it to Kikukawa-kun then...”

“Well then, since it is already the time, I should leave soon. Counselor Sudou...”

“Alright, once again, thank you for your hard work. Please do contact me if there's anything else...”

They said what needed to be said. Soon after that, Kikukawa left the room after he deeply bowed toward Sudou who didn't show any change in his attitude.

After Kikukawa left, Sudou relaxed his body on the sofa while glancing at the ceiling.

‘Khukhukhukhu. This will be fun...’

For Sudou, the organization's ideals and desires were no longer important. He did

things only because he held some obligation.

Blood, more blood, red blood...

That was the only desires Sudou wanted...

“Now then... How are you going to move, Mikoshiba-kun?”

Sudou words echoed inside the room followed by a merry laughter.

It was as if he was the strong man looking at the weak one.

He didn't know that Mikoshiba Ryouma had already begun to move.

Chapter 6

Adventurer 1

Grass-covered plains were spreading in front of one's eyes.

Amidst the magnificent scenery, something huge, black, and flat, was moving through the ground while shaking the earth.

(I see... Certainly, that's huge... So, that is the Big Eater, huh?)

The thing he was gazing upon was a huge centipede monster with its numerous legs.

The distance between him and the monster was around a few hundreds of meters.

The figure of the monster was very disgusting so much so that it might actually cause nausea just by looking at it.

Then, the name Kevin had heard in the Guild the other day comes to mind.

(15 meters... No, I think it's around 20 meters? It is best to crush the centipede's head if someone wants to kill it but, it is impossible to kill this one with just using our feet alone...)

While keeping an eye on the centipede, Kevin showed a bitter smile.

It was not that hard to step on the centipede since it was not that high, but it was impossible to kill it with only one's foot. In fact, with that huge body, even if Kevin had a solid body, the monster might only feel itchy from Kevin's weight.

(I guess the other way might be to cut one of its legs? But without figuring out how to handle that movement speed, it would be impossible to do that...)

Not only did it possess agile movements, it was also very aggressive...

The chances of that monster managing to bite and tear off one's body was high.

And if they didn't do something to slow down the centipede's movements somehow, the result would be them having to fight it in close combat.

(Had this place been a rocky place, it would have been easy to kill it by dropping some stones... but I guess, that is also impossible.)

Kevin's eyes scanned the surroundings while thinking about that.

It was a grassy plain with a good view. There was hardly any terrain that could be used as the place to drop the rock.

(I guess the last method would be using martial magic arts to attack it from the front and using chanting magic arts from the back? But well, no matter how much we attack from the front, the result would still be a bit doubtful...)

Kevin turned his gaze back and leaked a small sigh.

(If it's me, then I would use chanting magic arts to slow it down or use traps and decoys... But, I wonder, how captain Rick would deal with this...)

It was a big bet for someone to face an adversary while risking one's life together with people who have not yet built a relationship of trust with you.

Individual competence was unknown, and whether or not the group could cooperate might cause uneasiness as well.

Nonetheless, right now, Kevin was part of a group/clan specialized in adventurer work, such as monster extermination and resource gathering, and the name of the clan was [Cloud of the Azure sky]. And the leader of that clan is Rick who had a high reputation among other adventurers who were currently active within the Rozeria Kingdom.

Rick individual guild rank was a double-A, while his clan as a whole had a single A rank. Such evaluation was above those of the [Red Lion] who trained Kevin and the others.

Of course, there were some differences between mercenaries and adventurers clans, and the rank from the guild was not necessarily a direct link to one's strength, but it

was without a doubt that it would be difficult for someone weak to reach such high rank.

(Well, I guess, I can only try before saying it is impossible, huh? Furthermore, I can finally kill something worthwhile after all this time...)

Excitement spread throughout Kevin's body.

Having muscular strength peculiar to insect and skin as hard as steel armor. The centipede who had the combination of both was a living nightmare.

However, that didn't mean the large centipede was a predator belonging to the absolute rank.

Otherwise, humans who were the weakest creature and more fragile than any others wouldn't be able to dominate the majority of this world.

Kevin had several plans drafted inside his head to kill that centipede.

Within the Wortenia Peninsula, many dangerous creatures lived.

He would not be able to survive if he was not someone who could kill this kind of monsters.

Although his appearance was a child in mid-teens, he had extensive battle experiences.

It was already two and a half months since he had left the Wortenia Peninsula. Finally, he met a prey that was worth his time, thus naturally he showed a smile on his face.

"How is it, Kevin. That is one of the dangerous monsters nicknamed by the guild as [Big Eater]. In other words, a big game..."

From behind him a man with deep voice talked to him, and he tapped Kevin's shoulder.

At that moment, Kevin's expression changed instantly. It was an expression of nervousness and fear plastered on his face.

(Phew, that's bad... I can't let my identity get out here...)

Kevin slowly turned back while suppressing the excitement that started to surge

inside his body.

Currently, Kevin was under a [cover story], he had introduced himself as an amateur adventurer, and a secret child of a fallen knight household.

“Yes, I’ve never thought it would be that big... Are we really going to go up against that, Captain Rick?”

He used voice mixed with embarrassment and fear.

Also on his face, he used an expression that usually a recruit would’ve shown during their first battle.

When he turned back, a pair of man and woman entered Kevin’s field of view. they were the number one and number two among the clan’s member.

A middle-aged man with dazzling looks and short, trimmed hair spoke to Kevin.

“Right, that thing is not just big. Not only is its skin very hard, it also possesses vitality similar to that of an insect. Originally it might be just a centipede, but it would become dangerous if it grows that big... That thing might not be able to use magic arts but, its muscular strength and hard skin are a serious threat. I don’t know whether or not it was true, but someone said that that thing is equal in strength when its compared to a lower class dragon species. Despite it is just a centipede...”

“A dragon, is it?”

In this world existed dragons from various species, from lower-class to upper-class dragons, they possessed power that was impossible for a human to reach.

Only a few people had seen them personally because they were small in numbers and also rarely came out of their hideouts. But one thing was certain, the damage would be tremendous the moment they start to rage around. Villages and towns would be reduced to ashes, and if handled poorly, it was not weird for a country to get destroyed.

That was why damage caused by dragons was usually regarded as a natural disaster.

And even though Wortenia Peninsula was called a land with many monsters, Kevin never once saw a dragon.

No, in fact, even if we go back to the dawn of history, those who had survived after fighting against dragons were less than 100 people.

Kevin swallowed his saliva after he heard the man's threatening story.

"Well, what I told you just now was a joke, but it would not be a joke if we leave that creature alone for much longer... After all, rarely do such big creatures appear in public, yet it is appearing now. Do you know why?"

As if enjoying Kevin's reaction, Rick asked a question...

"Of course, it is because they had tasted human flesh, right?"

It wasn't only humans that could get more power from killing other creatures. <TLN: Power here means all things, such as more Prana, experience, etc>

In fact, it was no exaggeration to say that insects and monsters received more benefits from power-ups than humans.

A principle of the survival of the fittest.

Eat or be eaten, kill or get killed. Only the strong ones would be born from such harsh competition.

That was if we only talk about the standard.

Here, even though humans might be able to kill a dragon, such possibility was one in a million. It was close to that of a miracle.

If we talk about the possibility, then with how low the possibility was, such task would be considered as close as impossible to achieve.

—

However, despite people calling it impossible, it didn't mean it was not doable since sometimes the goddess of destiny give a huge power to the little ones.

Which sometimes overturn the law of the food chain...

"That's right... The new face here seems to have learned his lesson well... As you had

said, it was confirmed that that thing had tasted/eaten adventurers or mercenaries in the forest, and after gorging itself, it began to crawl out. From that monster's point of view, adventurers and mercenaries were nice preys..."

Rick was satisfied with Kevin's answer.

Whether the taste was good or not wasn't important for the monster : those who had the shape of humans would provide raw nutrients and Prana at the same time.

That was why, humans needed to fight in order to survive.

"As of now, five people have been confirmed eaten by it. There were also those adventurers who had not yet come back from the forest, thus there might be more than ten victims... That is why the guild has set this matter as a top priority..."

A woman with bewitching expression showed a soft smile while talking to Kevin.

It was a wavy blond-haired woman, with gold-rimmed glasses on her face.

Kevin frowned after he heard Anastasia's words, she was regarded as the number two within the [Cloud of the Azure sky].

"Is this amount of people enough to hunt such monster? Isn't it better to have more?"

Kevin's line of sight drifted towards the men and women on the back.

Their numbers were around 20 people.

The average party had a number of people around four to ten, thus here they had the amount of personnel equal to more than two parties.

Although it was not a small number of people, it was not wrong to always want more.

It was obvious that these people had abundant experience, but Kevin thought that the number of people here was insufficient to face that kind of monster.

(To fight against that kind of class monster, I wish we have twice the current numbers...)

If possible, he wished around 50 people. Gazes filled with uneasiness and sadness were poured towards Anastasia.

It was Kevin being half acting, half serious.

Kevin had no intention of being intimidated by that centipede, but he was also not that naive.

It was true that Kevin had the experience of killing many monsters of that class together with his colleagues when he was on the Wortenia Peninsula.

But that was the result of passing through the bloody training which strengthened their bonds and relationships at the same time.

It was only less than two months ago since Kevin joined [Cloud of the Azure sky]. He knew that the clan's reputation was high in the guild, and he also managed to understand the ability of certain individuals inside the clan, but it didn't mean he understood them completely already.

And lack of understanding each others could occasionally cause a fatal accident.

(First I should watch whether or not it is really possible, if the situation turns bad, I should immediately run... I can't let myself get killed here after all...)

Do not fight unless there was the possibility of winning. Such teaching was deeply ingrained inside Kevin's mind.

He thought cautiously as he tried to calm his excited mind.

However, from Rick and the others point of view, Kevin's attitude only looked like an anxious rookie.

"What's wrong? Scared? If you follow Anastasia's directions, everything should be fine... Well, I can understand your feelings, but don't look so uneasy like that. If you're too fidgety, your luck will decline, you know?"

"It will be fine... You should focus on what you need to do..."



Saying that, Rick slapped Kevin's back while laughing as if to ease his tension. And Anastasia showed a soft smile while walking back to their comrades.

"I guess more than this would be impossible, huh..."

Originally, Kevin wanted to hear the complete strategy but if the newcomer asked such a thing, it would give an unnatural impression.

(Now then, do you both have the capacity to meet my Lord's expectation, I guess for now I should observe them...)

Kevin lifted his lips while looking at the back of the two people, a smile that was not suited for a rookie appeared on his face.

Here begins the mission his Lord had given him.

Chapter 7

Adventurer 2

The sun had already sunk on the horizon. The fortified town was filled with the hustle bustle of nightlife, and among those, one man was buried in the countless paper works.

Celebrating the success of the previous mission, voices of the clan's members can be heard downstairs.

It was a big job given by the guild as an urgent request which they had not done after a long while.

The job was the subjugation of that big centipede creature. They had managed to subjugate it while only suffering minor injuries.

It was no wonder that the members raised a voice of celebration.

(They seem to have a lot of fun... Well, such is a good thing.)

Rick who heard the noises could only smile wryly while feeling a slight envy.

Currently, the members of the Cloud of the Azure Sky were drinking and eating meat excitedly in the inn they had borrowed especially for today's celebration.

After being satisfied to some extent, some would then disappear into the town's night street. In order to suppress the feeling of exaltation after surviving a life and death situation, most of the men would seek a woman's soft warm body.

Such was an instinctive desire for human beings.

Rick himself, when he was young, often would bring the money he got from a job and go to the red districts together with his colleagues.

However, from Rick's standpoint now, he had no freedom to behave like a young man anymore.

As the head of the clan, he needed to finish the paperwork.

Rick who had finally reached the last bundle of paper filled with bills from merchants, sighed deeply.

“Good, this is the last one...”

A heavy fatigue that he had never felt when he fought against monsters assaulted his body.

Rick's nature was that of a warrior. He was the type of man that would go to the front line and wear armors on his body.

Drown in the enemy's blood, and dancing with the god of death. With his skills and a little bit of luck, he had survived many battles with the only weapon on his hands.

For such brave man, this kind of paperwork was more painful than that of a battlefield.

Although it was something Rick had repeatedly done, his body never got used to it.

(I've never thought that it would be like this... Had I known, I would not have readily accepted when father retired and asked me to take over the clan...)

Although it was something inevitable, every time Rick recalled the decision he made back then, he sighed deeply.

He was just an orphan from a village that was caught in a war and lost both of his parents. The man who picked up little Rick and looked after him was Donovan, the former head of this clan.

To be honest, Rick was not exactly sure why Donovan picked him.

Whether it was for the convenient labor force, or because Donovan felt something from Rick's eyes, or maybe it was just a whim... Rick never knew the reason.

However, regardless of the purpose, Donovan raised him as a warrior. Sometimes he would teach Rick harshly, sometimes gently, and before long, he was like a father to Rick.

It was five years ago that Donovan decided to retire from the adventuring business. At that time, he was already more than 60 years old, and for that reason, most of the clan's member thought of him as a father.



Of course, despite being old, his ability was well known. Thus it was possible for him to continue working if he wanted to.

His martial arts comprehension and Prana absorption had become slower compared to the young ones.

But he had overwhelming life experience and a strong body.

If Donovan asked for it, any country would give him a captain rank in their army.

For what reason such Donovan decided to retire from the adventurer's work? Rick himself never heard of it.

However, after becoming the head of the clan, Rick somehow could understand the reason...

(Well, I guess it was natural for him to feel fed up...)

Meaning that a person should not just be strong, but also need some brains.

It cost money to keep a clan.

Income and expenditure.

Profits and expenses.

If one were to work as a solo adventurer or mercenary, they could just perform simple accounting, but Rick had a few men under him, which formed the group called "Cloud of the Azure Sky", thus it won't do if he only did simple financial gimmicks...

Beyond battles, there was the need to take care of other essentials such as weapon maintenance and supplies. And since his clan didn't have a base, they needed to stay at an inn or forced to camp outside.

If someone gets injured, the treatment expenses were large, and if it was diagnosed as something impossible to recover, it was necessary for him to cover a reasonable amount of money in accordance to the person years of service and achievements.

Of course, such things were not mandated by law. Because in this world, the form of human rights and concept of employment or worker's rights were not yet being developed.

But that didn't mean that way of thinking didn't exist either...

When it comes to living, there was not much of a difference between the two worlds.

And also what one needs to do as necessary.

When people recognized the need, then they must act in response.

Although it was not recognized by law, Rick had to do something even if there wasn't any obligation.

Donovan, the former head, was fully aware of such necessity. Although he also realized that he was not suitable for desk work.

(Well, I don't think I'm suitable either...)

Rick floated a bitter smile while looking at the mountain of documents stacked on the desk.

It was hard for an amateur to negotiate with merchants.

Although in the end he would be swindled to some extent, it would be bad if he would be had too much.

Although he could be assertive when in negotiation, still seven out of ten times he would still end up swindled.

The position of the head who had to perform negotiations only seemed to be a very ill-suited role for Rick.

Or rather, for Rick now, there was also other stuff he needed to think about other than negotiations with those merchants.

(Besides, there were many suspicious things happening... Since we have enough money for now, should we leave Rozeria?)

Despite choosing the battlefield as an occupation, adventurers and mercenaries still could not escape the authority of a country or of influential persons. The more one gained rank within the guild, the more one had power, and around that time more or less one gained some political obligations.

If towns or villages were being attacked by monsters, they would work as normal

adventurers or mercenaries, but it was not that irrelevant for adventurers to get roped in and involved in a war where the city they had chosen as a base is engulfed in a conflict.

All the more if one were to have friendly relations with the influential people.

That was why most mercenaries and adventurers devoted themselves to information gathering. Because they understood that some rumors might decide whether or not they could survive tomorrow.

(Princess Lupis... No, I guess she's a Queen now?)

Rick had been to the royal capital only once. At that time, he saw Lupis' face by accident, and remembering that, he could only smile wryly.

She was someone who loved her people and respected justice. Everyone would agree, that Lupis Rozerianus was loved by her people.

Many citizens cheered when she ascended to the throne, driving away Duke Gerhardt from the political stage.

For a long time, Rozeria Kingdom was ruled by the nobles' tyranny.

Although privileged class existed in all country and was something inevitable, every since Duke Gerhardt held the real power, the condition of this country was extremely harsh.

Meanwhile, the change of government happened.

(But well, I guess this is something that is to be expected...)

For the people who had lived a suppressed life, the presence of Lupis must have given them hope. They rejoiced at that feeling. Without knowing that such thing was just a fantasy.

It was impossible for Rick who was an adventurer to analyze what was wrong with Lupis reign, and he also didn't have the intention to do so. Only he felt the current Rozeria Kingdom was in a more dangerous state than at the time during the civil war.

In the guild, there was no demand for killing bandits or security requests, and many

villages had begun reinforcing their vigilante groups.

Everyone had seemed to realize that a storm was about to come.

And right now, among Rick's clan members, there was someone he could not stop thinking about.

That man, even though he was a new face, he had more ability than he would let show.

His ability as an adventurer might be low, but when it comes to his individual proficiency alone it was comparable to the middle ranked members of the clan.

As the guild staff said indeed, he was a promising young man.

However...

(A newcomer, with that kind of skill, at this kind of time, joining us... If it was only that, then it should've been something worth celebrating. But, was it truly coincidental?)

There was nothing wrong in particular if such man wanted to become a mercenary or adventurer and wished to join a clan as a mean for a stable life.

The problem was if such person joins for some other hidden reason.

(I should consult with Anastasia about this...)

Rick didn't regard himself as someone stupid.

His views as a person had expanded considerably since he had become the clan's head, but his nature was that of a warrior, his true talent was for battles.

Negotiation with merchants was not his forte. Thus for him, the existence of Anastasia who was the deputy head of the clan can be regarded as the clan's brain.

She was born as an illegitimate child of a noble family, and compared to the commoner-born Rick, she was much more thoughtful and considerate towards other people.

"Oi, Lloyd, are you still there?"

When Rick called the person, a middle-aged man immediately opened the door.

“Do you need me, boss? Is your job finally done?”

His eyes shone with expectation. A face that was expecting certain words from Rick. His body fidgeting as if he was a young boy who wanted to go out for an excursion.

“That’s not it, stupid. There’s still a lot of them...”

Hearing Rick’s merciless words, Lloyd’s hope was crushed.

“Is that so...”

A sunken expression appears on his face.

Today was Lloyd’s duty to guard the head of the clan, which was kinda a bad luck for him.

His duty was to follow Rick who was the head and help him with some chores, and also as security.

Which meant, unless Rick’s work is finished, Lloyd needs to keep himself together, while his other colleagues enjoy the night.

“Lloyd, you won’t be able to drink tonight... Just give up, anyway, go and call Anastasia now... She should be in her room by now...”

“I understand... Geeez, why did my turn coincide with this kind of party... Since I will give up on going out with women and go drinking, please treat me with some good food after the head’s work is finished, okay?”

“Fine, fine... I will let you have drink as much as you want later. Go and call Anastasia now...”

Sending away the Lloyd who looked displeased, Rick directed his eyes towards the ceiling.

(Well, I can understand his feelings...)

Rick himself didn't want to force his subordinates to guard him, but after Anastasia had given her advice to do so as deputy's head, and seeing her suggestion had saved Rick from losing his head multiple times, he could not stop the policy now...

In reality, when one becomes the head of a clan, one cannot avoid getting involved with politics.

A celebration for finishing a big job. Even for Rick, he could understand how painful it was for Lloyd who couldn't participate in the party with the others. From Rick's point of view, had he not have the job as clan's head, he would've already jumped out and enjoyed the night.

"I guess this is part of the job, haaah..."

Saying that Rick took out a cigar and sighed a little.



"She's late... That Anastasia, what on earth is she doing?"

Rick looked puzzled while smoking.

According to Lloyd's report, it seems the timing was kind of bad.

Although Anastasia said she would be here immediately when he knocked on her door.

Anastasia was a strict person. It was rare for her to make Rick wait for too long...

When Rick thought whether or not he should call her once again, the door was quietly being knocked.

"Head, I'm sorry for making you wait... May I come in?"

Listening briefly, it was her usual bewitching voice.

However, Rick instinctively could feel that there was some slight tension in Anastasia's voice.

It can be said that he felt that, because she was his comrade who had survived a lot of life or death situation together with him.

(Did she get threatened by somebody? That does not seem so... She spoke as if suppressing some high tension within her emotions.)

“Sure, come in, Anastasia...”

Rick allowed Anastasia while having some thought in his head.

“Then, please excuse me...”

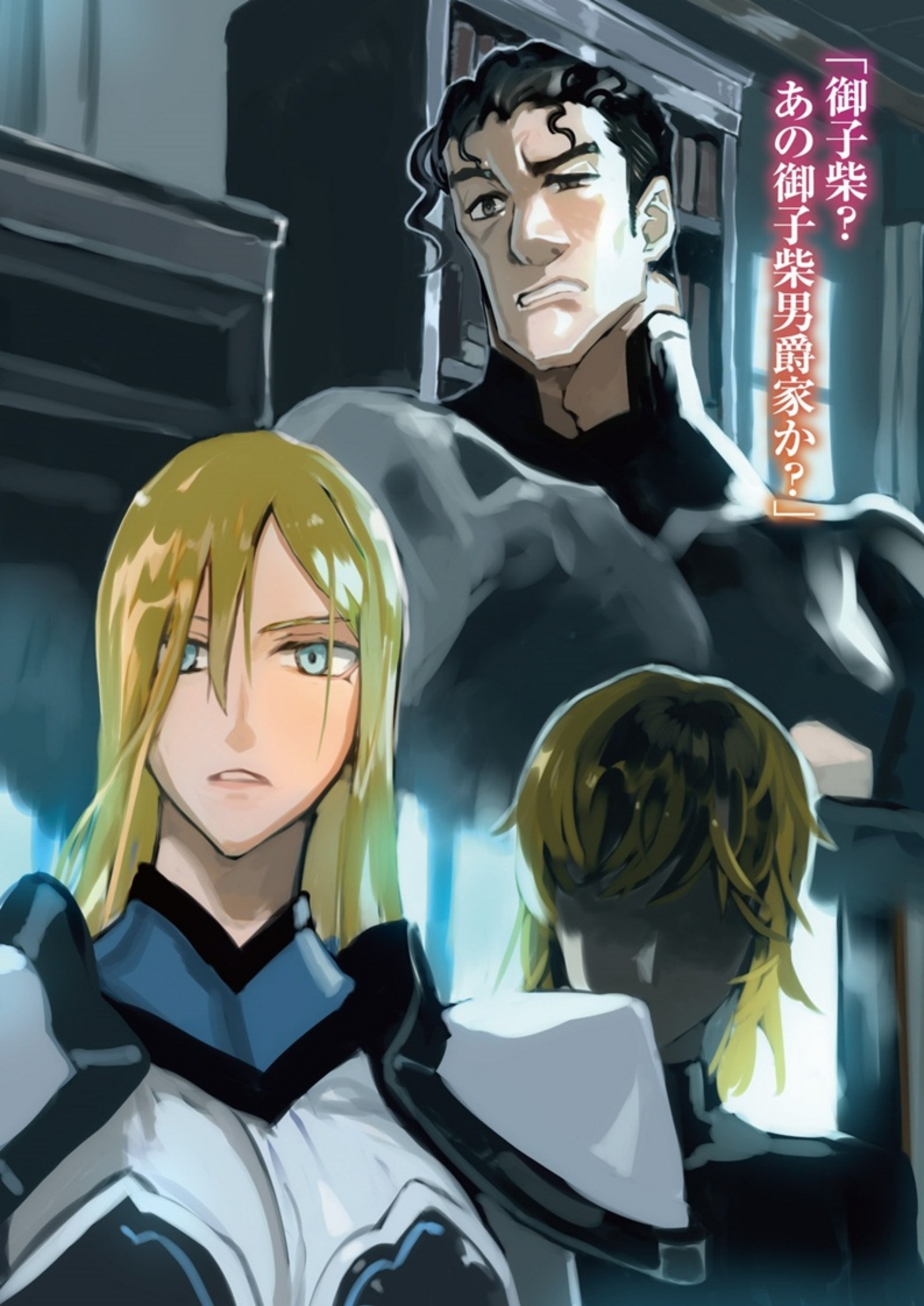
The door opened slowly.

“I see... So that’s how it is...”

Despite wanting to say that she was late, the words that came out from Rick was different.

After he saw the man standing behind Anastasia.

「御子柴？
あの御子柴男爵家か？」



That day, the talks proceeded until midnight. Only the three of them knew what was the content of the discussion.

And that day was the turning point where the Clan [Clouds of the Azure Sky] would undertake active jobs in Rozeria.

After several months passed since that day. The gears of history would start to turn with creaking noise... With human blood as its oil.

Chapter 8

And the Opening Bell Rings 1

It was a somewhat hot day with the sun rising above the head.

A white cloud floats above the sky, while on the hill there were some sheeps eating grass.

Time flowed gently.

Certainly, there was a threat of bandits or monsters in this world. However, they rarely attacked the villages that had moats and fences around it.

And the probability of such villages being attacked was only once or twice each year.

Even when one lived in a world filled with war, it didn't mean there was no place for peace.

However, such small peace was easily broken by just a little malice.

For small villages that didn't have any strategic value, the officials dispatched from the central government or the feudal lord are usually the one who threatened their peace.

And now, in a small village located in the countryside of the Rozeria Kingdom, one could hear angry voices reverberates despite the peaceful landscape.

A square set in the center of the village. Villagers stood to form a ring showing a mixed expression on their faces. The group of the villagers directed their sight at the center of the ring.

Or more precisely, the man standing in front of the villagers.

"Please don't joke with us... If you take more than this, we won't be able to live..."

Words of plea come out from a desperate middle-aged man, that was being interrupted by a dull sound.

A big fist covered in metal glove easily punched the man's face.

Taste of blood spreading inside the man's mouth. The drip of blood coming out from the middle-aged man's mouth stains the earth black.

"Father..."

Eyes mixed with anxiety and fear. A girl shakes off her mother's hand and jumps into the center.

The young girl looked very young. She herself knew that even if she jumped to her father, she won't be able to do anything. However, the girl was still unable to ignore her father's appearance.

Looking at such beloved daughter, the man tried to calm her down by holding her shoulder.

In truth, the man didn't wish for his daughter to see this kind of scene.

(Why... Why is this happening?!)

Various thoughts emerged inside the man's head.

Certainly, when Lupis Rozerianus ascended the throne, everyone felt a wave of new transformations. From the time when she was in charge of the chivalric order, the people familiar with her would describe the Princess as someone with a fair personality.

The man can still vividly remember the cheers he had with his colleagues when she became a Queen.

If one needs to say, then indeed changes definitely happen. However, the changes were not something good for the man.

"I will say it again... When are you going to pay the taxes?"

From the back of the knight that hit the man, the tax collector smiled with a disgusting smile, casting cold words at the man who fell due to the punch.

Individuals who loves to dominates others were usually humans that won't feel anything even when they tramples over others.

As a tax collector, the value of the man in front of him was his taxes.

It was the same as hunters who didn't care about their prey.

"Of course, we will happily pay if we can... But, right now this is the limit..."

The man's words once again were disturbed by a dull sound.

His diaphragm was struck with a punch which caused the man to be unable to breathe for a moment. The knight from earlier once again attacked.

"Geez, you plebeians are truly beyond help... Are you truly that stupid? I asked you when you're going to pay. I don't want to hear your circumstances..."

In the merciless world of tax collectors, the man could not do anything but spat out cursed words inside his mind.

(Damn it, shit, shit... Doing whatever you want...)

Dark murderous intent springs up inside the man's heart. In his mind, he wanted to stab the tax collector to death.

In the first place, the man had no way to pay the sums the tax collector wanted him to do. Even if the man can be said to be quite well off in this village.

And the man didn't have the intention of avoiding taxes either.

Since the man who was previously a peddler understood that the Rozeria Kingdom was in crisis and needed more money.

That was why he closed the store he had built.

Originally, cash income from small villages was insignificant.

Self-sufficiency was the basic for such villages, and to supplement the things they didn't have, they performed bartering with other villages.

They could only make cash if adventurers, mercenaries, or peddlers visit their villages.

To live in this villages it didn't require much money. Well, that was until the tax

collector appeared at this village.

(I've had even sold most of the store goods, yet is it still not enough now?!)

It had all started with the slogan of rebuilding the country.

Of course, at first, everyone cooperated with it. Since they placed high hopes to the new Queen, and they also loved the country.

But, it didn't end there... Once, twice, on and on, endless tax collectors came one after another... At first, it was just a small amount that it didn't affect the villagers' lives, but it gradually escalated.

Pressures started to build up.

And anger also starts to swell inside the people's heart.

To be precise, if it was only once or twice, they would manage to pay. However, to the tax collector, such things didn't matter. The only thing left for the middle-aged man was to sell his family as slaves. Otherwise, his family would have to move away and wander around without a home.

(If I could earn more money... Like this, will I just lose everything again?)

Regrets and fear run throughout the man's body.

He was not that of a great merchant.

However, he was an honest person with a kind nature that helped the people in the back alleys to earn some small income. Thus his friendship was wide and many people loved him.

As a good man.

Had he been born in the modern era, or at least in a developed country, he would've received high respect from the surroundings. However, in this world, such virtue could mostly bring harm instead.

Once upon a time, he was asked by a friendly acquaintance of him to lend some money.

At that time, he had a plenty of cash on his hand since he was a former peddler and

had a shop of his own. He had the money, but he never had such big deals during his life.

However, the acquaintance of him bowed down and begged while pleading. Then he lends the money believing that he would return the money in time.

However, when the man visited his friend's house following the deadline, he saw many creditors there. It seems due to a storm, the ship of his acquaintance sunk to the bottom of the sea along with the expensive cargo.

And his business partner disappeared with the money he lent him to. As a result, the man lost everything.

The failed big deal battered his credibility as a merchant.

The fact that he was deceived by his acquaintance who he trusted, raised a question mark regarding his competence. He was branded as someone who could not see a person's character.

The way the man lent his money just because of a verbal promise also became a disadvantage for him.

Although he appealed to the feudal authorities, the lord didn't listen to him and drove him away.

There was no effective way to clear a dispute in a countryside when the one he was up against had already disappeared.

In the modern world, the power of social security was very apparent, and the state organisations of enforcing such security was strong, while in this world, one can only respond in real time to disputes that happened.

Since it would've been very hard to investigate every territory and every people in this kind of era.

Thus, the man's goodwill was being trampled all over and he lost everything. And towards him who was in such decline, no one was willing to help. Yes, including the business partner he was kind towards in the past...

He fell into the depth of disappointment and left the town, then he wandered around. He was just like a moving corpse back then.

But, his fate change when he meets a woman during the time he happened to stay in this village.

The love that appeared lit the fire inside the man's heart, and once again he tried to stand up.

And a new life was born between him and her.

(No... No matter what, I won't sell my wife and daughter...)

The one that the tax collector look at was not the crouching man. The tax collector was looking at his daughter who comes close to him and was shivering on his back. And after the tax collector got his daughter, he could guess that his wife would be next.

Despite coming from a small village, both of them looked refined. Even without their bright attitude and beautiful faces, their figure alone could capture a man's heart.

For people who wants to get in a relationship, their appearance was much more preferable than the impossible-to-obtain absurdly beautiful one.

Thus, to change those two women into gold was not something difficult.

He could sell them to the brothel, and obtain enough money for his life and even enjoy some nightlife.

From the gold he obtains, he then would be able to pay some taxes and fees towards the tax collector.

Or rather, since it was this kind of tax collector, it was highly possible that the tax collector would demand to taste the two women's body before selling them

The problem was that there was no way for the man to stop it.

(Didn't her majesty say she will change our lives?)

He spat his saliva to the ground and slowly stood up.

He clenched his fist firmly. There was a flame of dark anger appearing inside his eyes.

"Don't just keep silent. In the first place, this strict tax is the order of her majesty the Queen. For rebuilding this country and protect our citizen..."

The tax collector walks up to the man while showing a dirty smile.

The two men stared at each other in close distance.

The smell of cheap cigarettes exuded by the tax collector entered the man's nose.

"Her majesty Lupis Rozerianus need the tax money to defend and nurture the country you know? And it is not only the feudal lord that needs to pay. If you don't pay, it is the same as going against the Rozeria Kingdom. Meaning a traitor... A rebel..."

"Traitor..."

Yes, when that happens, your family naturally won't escape harm so easily. Even if you struggle, the result will be the same..."

The tax collector lifts his lips and laughs.

If one can put the stigma of a rebel to someone, it was the same as a death sentence for the person's entire family, which will be turned into slaves.

It was no different compared to selling his family and paying the tax.

It was the villager who diverted his gaze first. Despite his anger, he could only cast his gaze down.

A patriotic man usually won't feel guilty as long he regards what he did, was for the country's sake.

But what the man felt right now was fear. The terror of the overwhelming power of the huge system called a country.

Being overwhelmed by the merciless words of the tax collector, the man looked at the ground.

He could not imagine that he would be able to go up against a country when he was just a mere commoner.

For villagers, even if they complained once in a while, it never crossed their minds to go up against a country.

(Then what should I do? To protect my family... To protect my village?)

The man desperately seeks a solution. This was the harshest situation he had faced since the time he was born.

For the villagers, for his family, for his own happiness... The man desperately worked his head.

A long silence dominated the square.

However, the time would come when he needs to speak of an answer.

A moment later, the time comes... In the form that nobody expected.

Chapter 9

And the Opening Bell Rings 2

(Anger, frustration, and despair. An unbearable expression mixed with various feelings)

In this heavy air, the knights in the surroundings have kept their expression like a Noh mask. But one man was desperately trying to suppress his laughter.

The man name was Elliot Chamberlain. His hair was red and he had white skin. It was someone with a relatively common feature when compared to the people living in the Rozeria Kingdom.

But actually, he was an American born with british lineage.

Although he had succeeded in suppressing his laughter, he cannot calm his trembling body.

The knight standing next to him directed a curious gaze since his armor began to rattle.

Of course, a decent human being won't be able to enjoy this kind of sight.

Even more so for a knight.

It was because they were given a strict order by their boss not to stop the tax collector.

Many knights present in this place were swinging between their sense of duty and sense of individual justice.

However, Chamberlain was different. For him, the value of humans being in this world was nothing more than that of a toy.

For Chamberlain, the scene in front of them looked like a good comedy.

Even if his co-worker directed a doubtful gaze, that nature alone he could not deny.

A tax collector who displayed his superiority and a commoner who was forced to succumb by sheer force.

Hatred and ridicule dominated both men's minds. Feeling such atmosphere, Chamberlain could not help but get turned on. <TLN: Written with "His penis get rock solid".>

(This atmosphere really give me a great feeling... Looking like this, it seems Sudou's plan would bear fruits faster...)

He and his colleagues were ordered to perform some mission in the Rozeria Kingdom. Chamberlain could finally feel the result of his hard work.

Gerhardt who was demoted following the aftermath of the civil war was still being treated as a duke by the other aristocrats.

Despite having been transferred from Irachion, a famous green territory, to a remote place in the southern part of the kingdom.

A legitimate title was surely important.

Indeed, it was a big hurdle and disgrace for Duke Gerhardt who had his rank demoted to that of a Viscount.

That was why it was natural for the other aristocrats to keep their distances from him after the civil war was over.

However, that situation was only in the past.

The nobles who had lost their job as tax collectors gathered under Gerhardt in the name of interest.

And it was Elliot Chamberlain and his co-workers who had created such a situation.

(Sudou-san this time has given us a really fun job. It really combines hobby and profits. I wish I could share this sensation with him right now...)

Chamberlain thanked Sudou who was currently in the Imperial capital. And at the same time, deeply regretted that he could not share the comedy with his boss.

(Well, Ortomea is currently in a mess, I guess it could not be helped... Well, let's enjoy the situation for Sudou-san's share as well...)

It was a pleasure for him to see the citizen of this world hating each others and murder each others.

(Go and kill each others. Struggle more, and hate each others more... Die, die, die, die... Everyone in this world should just die...)

It was the expression of someone who lost a beloved person because of the people of this world.

Seven years ago, when he was heading towards Wall Street like usual, he was summoned to this world together with his lover Vanessa.

A good looking beautiful businesswoman. It can be said, his situation was very commonly called hero setting.

A hero being summoned with his beloved. And then beautiful ladies from another world trying to enter the fray. That was the cliché scenario that usually happened.

However, the reality was far from that.

Chamberlain was not asked to be a hero, but instead a foot soldiers in a war, Vanessa who was an active model, being beautiful as she was, was made into a rare toy among aristocrats.

It was further bad luck because the one who used Vanessa as a toy had a distorted personality who liked to see women scream. Vanessa was a liberal and also a human right activist.

Thus Vanessa was a crispy prey for them. It made the aristocrats pleased when they heard Vanessa who had modern education screaming about her rights as a person when getting violated forcefully.

It was the sensation that one won't have by doing it with someone obedient.

As a result of that, Vanessa's heart who could not withstand the continuous assaults and tortures, and broke into pieces. The light disappeared from her eyes, and drizzle dripped from her half-opened mouth, Vanessa had turned into a broken doll, and the nobles threw such Vanessa back to Chamberlain. They threw her as if she was garbage.

Since they were particularly powerful nobles, they were able to procure as many toys as they wanted.

And Chamberlain who could not do anything because of the spell cast upon him, could only watch as everything happened.

The nobles were also having fun when violating and beating his lover in front of his eyes.

Watching his beloved cry and scream. Every day he was being forced to watch without being able to do anything. Thus it was difficult to imagine how Chamberlain felt during those times.

And from then that darkness started to appear inside his heart. It was the result of a good man who lost his sanity.

The thought of not wanting to cause his beloved any more sufferings, this financial businessman ended her life by his own hand.

While swearing that one day, he would kill that nobleman and his families. Chamberlain survived the many harsh battlefields with just that one desire.

He trained his body, he learned magic arts. He just seeks strength.

Such dream was actually inappropriate for Chamberlain who had a slavery curse engraved on him.

Until one day, the organization saved him.

(More, more! Trample more. Hate each others more. Keep stirring those hatreds...)

Currently, the commoners were indeed suffering the tyranny of the nobles. That was because those nobles had the authority. However, no matter what authority one had, there was a limit to everything.

And everything would collapse if they forced more pressure using their authority...

(You should've massacred those foolish nobles if you wanted to rebuild the country. Your Majesty the Queen...)

Chamberlain laughed inside his heart. For him who had come from another world, Lupis Rozerianus was like that of a ruler from a storybook.

Having burning ideals, loving the people, a high standard of education.

Originally, her reign may have become one of the most excellent ones in this world.

However, Lupis half-hearted naivety ended everything.

Not having Gerhardt's family purged, and only getting them relocated to another territory, the nobles who revolted must've thought they were also not going to die.

While afterwards Lupis' policy was filled with for-the-people-oriented policy.

For the nobles, they could only think that Lupis was nothing more than a naive woman.

Of course, ruling using fear was never the best way. Too much fear might raise doubt among people, and eventually caused the fruit called resistance to bloom. That was why it was better to make the commoner afraid of underestimating the government.

And the result of that spread in front of Chamberlain's eyes.

(It was very difficult for me to move the nobles back then, but thanks to her everything went smoothly.)

Most of the nobles were people that were stuck with the idea of elitism. And for them, it was easy to perform this kind of violence. However, only a few of them did it on their territory.

Because government works only when tax revenue existed. It will certainly raise the income of the territory temporarily if one shows off the authority one had, and forced the people to pay more.

But, such method could not be repeated more than once, since the result would decrease every time it was being repeated.

And security would also get worse, while the people's heart and faith in the government deteriorating.

When that happens, the things that would occur would've been either people crushing the government or the government crushing the people in the name of rebellion.

Most noblemen understood such matters sufficiently.

That was why, even when the aristocrats were looking down on the people, they kept the territory while maintaining a suitable balance.

But with a just cause of rebuilding the country, and the result of underestimating Lupis power. It caused the nobles to go mad.

(Furthermore, although some of the nobles being appointed as tax collectors are competent, many of them are third class. It was worthwhile to ask Gerhardt to pull some strings to cause those people being appointed. -)

Chamberlain turns a scornful smile towards the back of the tax collector.

The otherworlder used his skillful communication, that he had cultivated as a financial businessman in modern America, to gain his favor. After Chamberlain got his trust, he started to pour poisonous words to him.

(If it is like this, then I think everything would be over in 3 or 4 months... Until then, I need to control everything skillfully... I guess I should end it today here... Although I want to see more of this comedy...)



While glancing at the crawling villagers, Chamberlain moves closer to the tax collector.

He wants the public in the Rozeria Kingdom to raise a rebellion. But the timing was very important. More precisely the timing when the organization would then profit the most from it.

And right now, the organization had not yet given their green light. And if they corner the villagers more than this, it might instigate a revolt now instead...

“Your Excellency, these guys should’ve learned their mistakes. Let’s pull back today...”

“Why? If we threaten them more here, we can get some money...”

The tax collector tilted his head in response to Chamberlain’s words.

For inside his head, there were only thoughts about the amount of money he would get.

“I know... If we keep it up, they would definitely pay. However, if we threaten them too much here, it might cause them to revolt, which will affect your Excellency. We should pull back here and take this chance to make them feel grateful towards your Excellency...”

Self-protection and greed were fighting inside the tax collector’s mind...

He wanted money, but he didn’t want to be responsible for any chaos that entails.

“Fumu... If you say that much then, fine... Let us pull back for now...”

Soon afterwards, the tax collector agreed to pull back.

(You moron... There is no reason for these people to truly feel grateful towards you just because you pulled back here...)

“Thank you very much, your Excellency. We’re grateful for your mercy...”

Chamberlain was making a fool of the tax collector inside his mind and also felt disgusted with himself that he had to thank him for something...

And when he lowered his head to express his gratitude, something happened.

The sound of arrows splitting the wind entered Chamberlain's ears.

And the next moment, two arrows penetrated the tax collector's body.

"Your Excellency! Your Excellency!"

"Protect his Excellency!"

"Form a circle! Hurry! It's a revolt!"

Escort Knights came running one after another towards the body of the tax collector who was lying on the ground.

With all of this happening around, inside Chamberlain's mind, he tried to keep his calm. There was no fragment of concerns to the tax collector. He only moved according to the necessity.

(Damn it! Instant death, huh?)



Chamberlain who checked the tax collector's pulse by placing his hand on the now deceased's neck clicked his tongue.

Even though the tax collector was just a toy in Chamberlain's eyes, but if he died prematurely, the organization's plan might need some big revisions.

(If it comes to this, the question is who and why did they kill him...)

The arrows that pierced the tax collector's body were something that could be found anywhere. However, there was some kind of black liquid sticking to the arrowhead.

Chamberlain gently wiped it with his fingertips and briefly licked his finger with the tip of his tongue, but immediately he spits it.

(Poison... Now, this has become troublesome...)

The type of poison was unknown, but based on the bitterness that stimulates his tongue, he thought that it was a plant-based poison. And it was a fairly powerful one.

(If they used poison, that means it was not the villagers' doing... But if that is the case then, who?)

From the direction of the arrows, it was apparent that it was coming from beyond the village walls.

The problem was, who shot the arrows.

Judging normally, it would be one of the villagers who resented the tax collector. But, for mere villagers to use sophisticated poison, it was nigh to impossible.

Looking at the surroundings, Chamberlain tried to think about the situation.

"Oi, Chamberlain! What should we do about this?!"

One of Chamberlain's colleagues shook his shoulder.

It might be because of fear that his colleague's hand was shaking.

“Shut your mouth for a bit, I’m thinking right now.”

In the eyes of Chamberlain who raised his face, the visage of the villagers were instantly reflected.

From all of them, whether they were men, women, children, or old people, all of their eyes were filled with murderous intents.

One can see that from the start, they were already prepared for a revolt. Each of their hands was holding agricultural tools such as plow and hoe.

“I see now... So this is the aim of the culprit?”

Chamberlain muttered those words while sighing.

The tax collector was shot and died. Inside this village.

Thus no matter how much the village’s head tried to explain the situation, they would still be blamed for his death.

For that reason, there was no use for them to appeal. Since in the end, the one who judges would be the nobles...

And for those nobles, they have no reason to listen to the commoners’ argument.

One could already see the conclusion just based on the situation. And the villagers also understood that as well. And with hatred inside their heart, it further fueled their actions.

The villagers now didn’t have the usual calm face. They showed murderous intentions like beasts looking at their prey.

Slowly the villagers closed the circle between them and the knights. Their aim was Chamberlain and the other knights’ life.

“We have six people. While the villagers have more than 100 people with them... This will be hard...”

One knight was said to be as strong as ten people combined. However, that was the case when their mind and body were in perfect condition.

Their opponent was the people of their own country. In the first place, they were on the side who cornered them first. The villagers might think since the end would be the same no matter what they did, they choose to take the knights lives together with theirs.

Under those situation, the knights wouldn't be able to show their best performance.

"It can't be helped... Let's forcibly breakthrough. Follow me if you guys want to survive..."

While speaking to his colleagues who kept whining at him, Chamberlain pulled his sword.

Although they were a knight with magic arts capability, they were just six people. Even if one of them had the strength of ten people, it was not a guarantee that they could avoid the villagers' fangs in their desperate fight.

For an escorting mission it would be enough, but when this kind of situation happens, it would immediately put them into a disadvantageous situation.

(The situation right now is not accidental... Someone purposely made this timing to instigate a revolt... This is bad, we need to immediately leave this village)

Dissatisfaction and antipathy against the country were already well widespreadl in the Rozeria Kingdom.

Once one put fire on it, it would be hard to put it down.

(No matter how I think about it, it would be impossible to stop the revolt now... The timing of the revolt happens far from what the organization had planned. I can't imagine the effect of that on the organization's overall plan... I guess I have no choice... I need to contact my other colleagues and think about the countermeasure.)

After thinking about the next move.

Chamberlain began to get ready by activating his prana.



The rebellion that was about to happen inside the Rozeria Kingdom.

Initially, it was thought to be something that would be crushed easily, but as a result of citizen anxiety and discontent that spread throughout the country, the small fire turned into a wildfire that would burn the entire country.

It was the beginning of the second Rozeria civil war, and later would be regarded as the trigger of the complete destruction of the Rozeria Kingdom.

Chapter 10

And the Opening Bell Rings 3

It was the turning point of history.

The beginning of an incident that would later be engraved deeply into the history of the western continent, and it started with one seemingly unchanging morning.

“I told you it is up to you how to handle that, isn’t it? If you can’t do it then for what reason did we appoint you? This is not about can or can’t do. No matter what it takes, make it work...”

Inside the Rozeria royal capital, Pireaus.

A shouting came from a woman and echoed inside the white castle located in the center of the city.

The two guards who heard the voice coming from inside the room could only sigh.

These two people didn’t hate the lord of the room.

It was because they understood how hard the person had worked as someone who the young ruler of Rozeria trusted.

However, having to hear such shoutings daily, it could not help it that they wanted to sigh.

(It was a bad day today, huh... Or rather, today too...)

Such thoughts appeared inside one of the man’s mind.

In actuality, there was not even a day where the lord of the room seems to be in a good mood.

Back then when it was her first day after being given this big job, she entered the room with a smile on her face.

And in the past few months, this spectacle happened every day.

“But, Lord Lecter. Even I could only stand and watch without being able to do anything...”

A tall yet thin young man began to make an excuse to Meltina.

Thin sweat appeared on this nervous man.

Following the young man, the middle-aged man who was watching from the side opened his mouth slowly.

His stomach that protruded like a bag looked impressive.

“That’s right. To be honest, we have no other way to do this. Of course, the problem will be solved immediately if her majesty makes her decision. However, right now the possibility is low. With that being the case, I suggest we do not rush and try to break it down gradually and make some allies...”

Being shouted down by Meltina who was younger and also a woman, both men faces showed dissatisfied expression.

Even though they didn’t show it, they were experienced, low-level bureaucrats. They both had the experience and also achievements in handling various projects.

And according to them, Meltina demands wouldn’t be able to be realized under current conditions.

(What are you being haughty for, you’re just some novice when it comes to politics! You’re here just because you’re her majesty lackey...)

If they spat out the dark feelings inside their hearts, it was hard to imagine how refreshed they would be.

The men desperately endured their desires that wanted to shout at Meltina without mercy.

It was not because they were arrogant, but they felt like that because of their pride as a person. More so when the situation present was not because of their fault.

Still, they cannot show their anger at Meltina here.

They aren't doing so not because of right or wrong, but more because of courtesy. They simply didn't want their future work being affected by it.

These two men didn't mean bad. They both understood the root cause of Lupis' policy not going as they had expected, thus they proposed some measures to Meltina at an early stage.

While the two worked as much as possible within the scope of their position. Which was why, despite not having a good result, it cannot be said that everything was their fault.

However, whether or not Meltina could show understanding to that argument was doubtful.

Or rather, as far as Melita character was concerned, the conclusions were visible.

She won't hear other people if it was not the same as her own justice or feelings. On the other hand, she might've ended up hating the people who deny her righteousness.

Towards those two men, Meltina eyebrows frowned. And her finger played frustrating tap dance on the table.

(Does that mean you need time? Are you stupid? Do you think we have that kind of time?)

They were officials appointed when Lupis ascended to the throne.

Although these two men were rumored to be particularly outstanding among the young and middle-ranking officials, originally they wouldn't have had the chance to be in their current office. That was until Lupis took the throne.

It was because of Lupis that they could take the job of senior bureaucrats despite being only from lower-class aristocracy.

That was why they could not say no...

But even so, they still arrived at the conclusion that the policy was not possible unless the reality changed.

"Need time you said? Don't be stupid... Just how much more time do you need to spent?!"

A considerable amount of time had passed since Lupis took charge of the state's affairs.

Several months had passed since Meltina took her new job.

(Yet, nothing changes... Nothing at all...)

Lupis got the throne... And became the ruler of the Rozeria Kingdom.

However, if one were to be asked whether or not there was some change, the answer would be difficult to say... There were some indeed. It was just that everything went bad compared to before her crowning.

Even Meltina herself could feel it.

That she could not carelessly neglect the problem. How nice it would be if she could just admit it that everything was unmanageable.

“Whatever... enough for today, looking at your faces more than this feels sickening. Go and return to your offices immediately. I’m expecting a more decent report tomorrow...”

After frustratingly chasing away the two men, Meltina sits deeply into her sofa.

The moment she heard the closing door, she heaves a deep sigh. While looking at the ceiling, Meltina massages her eyebrows.

Her fingers got a little wet from doing it.

“Why... why won’t everyone cooperate with her Majesty? Why only pursue their own interests. Does nobody love this country?”

For Meltina, the Rozeria Kingdom was like a mother to her, and a very important existence. She believed that it was natural for her to drain herself to help the said important existence.

For such Meltina, the current situation was very hard to fathom.

Prior to Lupis sitting on the throne, Duke Gerhardt was the one who managed the state affairs, many people were afraid of tomorrow. Only senior aristocrats and their underlings prospered. And Meltina wanted to change that situation.

All efforts were made to make sure Lupis took the throne.

Looking at the circumstances, whether the effort was appropriate or not, it was not

the problem now.

What was important for her, was that Meltina believed that she had bet all of her everything on it.

Indeed, she had put much effort into her work, and the surroundings were also able to see it.

However, despite Meltina's efforts, the country didn't change. Aristocrats who corrode the country and use their authority as a shield. They only think about their own prosperity. Merchants that utilize their abundant financial capabilities and connections colluding with the nobles, they all still existed. Lastly, those people who hate the situation yet are only complaining... They all criticized Lupis.

(If this continues this country would be... Just what should we do?)

Meltina fully understands that there were problems. However, she didn't know how to solve it.

It was like a mountaineer that was about to conquer the mountain that no one had managed to conquer.

Although one could see the mountaintop, one didn't have the map or knew the path to reach there...

"Fuuh, I can't, I can't be like this... Her Majesty is in a harder position than I do... I will support her with everything I can..."

After heaving a small sigh, Meltina stood up from her sofa. She then moves towards the figure mirror placed on the corner of the room.

Her clothes were vibrant and as beautiful as usual. However, Meltina's face was definitely looking tired, and her eyelids were slightly swollen.

"What a horrible face I had... Despite the fact that I'm about to have a meeting after this..."

Gently stroking her cheeks, Meltina opened her cosmetic box placed on the shelf. Even though she's not that good when it comes to using cosmetics, still she could not go to a meeting with such a fuzzy face.



“Now then, what is today agenda? Are there any other topics?”

Lupis opened her mouth slowly while looking around at the people sitting on the roundtable, the room was being illuminated by the setting sun coming from the windows.

From the bottom of her heart, Lupis was tired of these meetings that were being held every day starting at 2:00 p.m.

The constantly unchanged conference room, the unchanging expression, the same discussions and the same topics. She felt this meeting was just a waste of time...

She wanted the conversation to move forward even if it was just a little.

In this kind of situation, the duty of making the meeting progress make it feel like a bad luck.

(In the end, it is just me holding a meeting again today... Nothing determined, nothing improved. They merely swear at each other, throwing responsibility back at each other...)

Everyone in this place were people chosen by Lupis.

They were people that had no problems governing on their territory despite not being in the nobles' faction

A clean, and fair country. They were supposedly the talent Lupis had chosen for the sake of making such country.

Thinking that Lupis almost accidentally heaved a sigh. Right now, she can't show an attitude or behavior that could be described as indifferent towards politics and current circumstances.

Lupis, in her own way, just wanted to fulfill her duty as the ruler of the Rozeria Kingdom.

(Is there anyone? What should we do? Is there anyone with some idea?)

Lupis looked around with stabbing eyes. That didn't mean that she didn't understand

the situation the country was in. In fact, her desire to solve the problem was stronger compared to everyone present in this room.

However, Lupis could not come up with a solution to solve the problem. The only thing she could think of right now was to pray that someone would suggest a means to solve the problem.

However, everyone averted their gaze away from Lupis' eyes.

Even her closest aides Meltina and Mikhail did the same.

“No one has some suggestions, is it?”

Then something happens when Lupis was looking around one more time before she ended the meeting.

Earl Bergston, sitting on the left of Lupis, raised his hand gently.

“Your majesty, may I say something?”

The surroundings immediately directed their eyes toward the Earl at the same time.

Chapter 11

And the Opening Bell Rings 4

(What is he going to say? Will it be a criticism for me, or...)

Her heartbeat was beating like a fast bell. Anxiety and subtle hope dominated Lupis' mind.

The persons who understand politics the most amongst Lupis' subordinates, Earl Bergston and his brother-in-law, they were, in fact, the people who should've held initiative when it comes to reforming the country.

When Lupis took the throne, Earl Bergstone was fully demonstrating his skills as the one responsible for proposing reform. It was the time when hopes and dreams for the future were high.

However, that honeymoon period didn't last long.

Lupis refused Bergston's motion who proposed using state power to enforce reform. Since then, there seems to be an invinsible crack in their relations.

And such crack became evident when Lupis made the decision to reinforce the Zalda Kingdom.

To put it more bluntly, it was the result of her trying to protect Mikhail from the cold glance, but that incident left a big rift between Lupis and Bergston.

In the end, Lupis decided to send Mikoshiba Ryouma and Elena as reinforcements to the Zalda Kingdom. There were no alternatives left to her.

After that, Earl Bergston stopped attempting to formulate aggressive policy, even his brother-in-law disappeared from the conference.

The result of that was this political confusion.

There were those who lack political ability, yet are loyal. And there were people who lack loyalty but have the ability. As such, there were two problems.

Speaking of chess as an example, it felt like the queen and the knight disappeared, and only pawns were lined up.

However, in chess, the pawn can also become the strongest piece, depending on how one used it, it could become a Queen by the rule called promotion.

(For me, I have no skill, talent, or experience in politics to manage them compared to Earl Bergston...)

After all, at the end of the day, everything depends on the player.

(In truth, it might be best for me to apologize to Earl Bergston and ask for help... But, it's impossible...)

Lupis herself also felt guilty when she made the decision.

But even when she understood that she had no other means.

And in Lupis' current position, she could not easily voice her regrets after making a decision.

Depending on which country, a King or Queen was the highest authority in charge.

To the surroundings, these two rulers were seen as an absolute person. If people in such position apologize and doubt his or her own decision, it will cause the surroundings asking about their competence and credibility as a ruler.

And since Lupis was lacking firm achievements, she had no clear right to question other people's competences when it comes to governance.

And more so, Lupis was afraid that by admitting that she was wrong, the people might direct their accusation at Mikhail Banashu instead.

For Lupis, he was an aide who she could trust just like Meltina. It didn't change even when people in the surroundings looked at him with cold eyes now.

When it comes to the future of the kingdom, Lupis herself understood that she needs to leave Mikhail.

However, no ruler could abandon all of their personal desires.

For the man that Lupis looked up to as an elder brother, she could only pray that time would solve everything. <TLN: So it was a familial love rather than romantic one.>

And Earl Bergston, who had kept silence since the time their relationship got worse, asked permission to speak. It would be inevitable if even she was almost unintentionally about to raise her body from the chair.

“Sure, please go ahead. I permit you to speak, Earl Bergston.”

“Thank you very much. Your Majesty...”

Hearing Lupis’ slightly grateful voice, Earl Bergston slowly rises from his chair. And after he bowed to Lupis once, he looked around at the surroundings, then breathed out heavily.

“I think all of you realize, including her majesty, that our country has many serious problems.”

A loud voice echoed inside the room.

Although it was not intimidating, his gentle voice clearly entered everybody’s mind.

A voice of a man backed with overwhelming confidence and beliefs.

“Essentially, every problems should be resolved immediately, but, if I have to point out the most concerning one, then the invasion by Ortomea Empire of Zalda Kingdom is the highest priority.”

Everyone around the table nodded silently.

After all, inside this room, everyone was desperately trying to rebuild the kingdom for the forthcoming event.

“We managed to settle the invasion of Zalda Kingdom last year by forging an alliance with ErnestGora and the eastern countries. However, we should not let us think that everything is over by that. Right now, I heard the Zalda Kingdom is attempting negotiations with the Ortomea Empire, but I believe that also won’t settle the problem. And Ortomea Empire will find some reason to invade the Zalda Kingdom once again.”

Voices of approval rise from everyone.

“And for such Ortomea Empire, they will try to break the alliance. In this case, what kind of possible movement they would make? When our nation needs to split its national strength to deal with issues other than the war in the Zalda Kingdom.”

Small mutters escaped someone.

“The Southern Kingdoms...”

The air inside the room froze.

Even an amateur who had a little bit of intelligence could understand, Ortomea Empire who claimed itself to be the champion of the center of the western continent cannot just withdraw as it had.

For Ortomea Empire who had placed other countries under its rule, the power lost against the Zalda Kingdom might lead discontented elements to then start to take the opportunity.

If that was the case then, Ortomea Empire could not afford to lose another war against the Zalda Kingdom. It was easy to see that Ortomea Empire would come up with a measure to achieve that goal.

Amongst the strategies Ortomea Empire would choose, most likely they would trigger something with the various southern Kingdoms, and cause hostility between two countries, Rozeria and Mist Kingdoms.

In the first place, the negotiations between the Zalda Kingdom and Ortomea Empire could happen because Mikoshiba Ryouma attacked Ortomea's logistical base, causing their army to become isolated while the three eastern countries and ErnestGora tried to form an alliance to deal with Ortomea Empire.

Even if Ortomea Empire was being regarded as a great country, it won't be able to easily stomp the alliance of the four countries.

With that being in the way, Ortomea then must think of how to break the cooperation of these countries.

The easiest way was that to increase one's allies while trying to divide one's opponents.

And the easiest way for Ortomea Empire to gain allies was by making contact with the southern countries, where they had repeated bloody battles with each other.

The southern countries' lands were mostly small, and their national strength was not that high, but their individual soldiers were very strong due to the combat experiences they had. In actuality, the Rozeria Kingdom also had several confrontations against the southern countries in the past.

If such confrontation were to happen again, then even if Rozeria Kingdom's national strength was better compared to the current one, they still wouldn't be able to send reinforcements to help the Zalda Kingdom.

(In the first place, if the situation were to remain like this, when the invasion happens, it would be hard for us to stop it. If that is the case then it might have been actually better if Lupis-sama stayed as a figurehead and let Duke Gerhardt rule as a prime minister...)

Such ironic imagination crossed Earl Bergston's mind and caused him to let out a small sigh.

The late Hodram and Duke Gerhardt were certainly problematic people.

They were self-righteous arrogant men, ambitious men who would do anything to raise their influence within the Rozeria Kingdom and make the king their puppet.

If one was trying to evaluate them, they were indeed despicable people. That was why a war broke out to remove those two men's influence and return the power to the throne.

However, what was the result of that?

The Rozeria Kingdom became a country filled with a flock of sheep without a shepherd.

(However, it does not mean we have to stay put without doing anything... This will decide everything...)

The room fell into silence. Everyone waited for Earl Bergston's next words.

Earl Bergston takes out his last trump card from the bag he had placed on his feet while receiving a curious sight from the surroundings. For this reason, he had kept silence for months.

However, the goddess of fate betrays Earl Bergston once again.

“Well then, this is...”

Earl Bergston took a heavy breath before continuing, but at that moment, the door of the room was knocked.



Chapter 12

And the Opening Bell Rings 5

One man looked up at the ceiling of his office while expressing his anguish.

No one knew how long he had spent in this state without moving since he had come home.

10 minutes, 20 minutes, 30 minutes. Or was it already 1 hour?

Inside the man's chest, were full of indescribable conflicts and regrets.

This was the first time he felt a sense of weakness and emptiness.

(I wonder, where did I go wrong... We should still have had a little bit more time... Did we make a mistake somewhere? Or was there no way to save this country from the beginning?)

When his father-in-law lost in the struggle for power against Duke Gerhardt, he never felt this hopeless even compared to his younger days when he had to stay indoor within his territory all the time.

"Please excuse me... Zeref-sama has come. Shall I let him in?"

The knockings of the old butler brought back the Earl Bergston's consciousness to reality.

"Let him in..."

Inside his heart, the feeling of wanting to meet and not wanting to meet intersected.

He directed his sight at the bundle of paper placed on the desk.

A few hours ago, that was the last trump card that could change the Rozeria Kingdom, but now, it was a garbage that had no purpose anymore. Just how much efforts and sacrifices did one had to make this mountain of papers that turned into uselessness, no one know the answer...

When he thought of that, the man didn't have the courage to look straight at the face of his brother-in-law who had trusted him sincerely.

Even when he knew that his relative was not someone who easily blamed others.

"Such a gloomy face you have there... Brother-in-law..."

Opening the door, Earl Zeref frowned his eyebrows the moment he saw his brother-in-law Earl Bergston.

"Well, I guess it can't be helped... Especially in this kind of situation..."

Earl Bergston replied with a deep sigh towards Earl Zeref who said those words while sitting down his obese body on the sofa.

"I heard it on my way here, that Her Majesty had collapsed after an urgent news arrived."

Feeling surprised, Earl Zeref stared at his brother-in-law.

"That's right, she collapsed after she heard that a rebellion happened. Right now she's resting in her bedroom. For her, she also has a lot to worry about after all... But still, you're impressive to know about this matter, how did you know? There should've been a gag order for those who attended the meeting..."

In response to that question, Earl Zeref shrugged his shoulders.

It was easy to order people to keep quiet, but it was very difficult to execute such order. And such things were obvious for Earl Zeref who was good when it comes to gathering intelligence.

"There's no meaning on placing a gag order if, in the end, it would spread you know? After all, even for a God, it was hard for him to keep someone's mouth shut. Especially now, when everybody was anxious about the country's future..."

In the first place, humans were a creature who liked rumors.

They would spread gossips like a ripple, from one person to another.

While in the same time interweaving truth and lies.

It was difficult to suppress such instincts with power.

“Something inevitable is it?”

“Right...”

Earl Zeref replied to Earl Bergston with affirmation.

The two people stared at each other for a while.

After a long silence, Earl Bergston slowly opened his mouth. Right now, for him, it was not the time to worry about Lupis’ health.

“I’ve wasted your good effort... I’m very sorry...”

Earl Bergston deeply lowered his head toward Earl Zeref.

However, Earl Zeref only smiled at him calmly like usual.

“Don’t worry too much, brother-in-law.”

“But!”

“It couldn’t be helped. Since originally it was something with a low chance of a success...”



Earl Zeref expression didn't show any hint of indignation. From the bottom of his heart, this time's result was something that could not be helped.

(This guy... Or was it because I'm still too naive?)

Seeing such attitude from his brother-in-law, Earl Bergston directed his eyes on his desk once again.

This bundle of papers placed on the desk was packed with information on tax collection being done within the Rozeria Kingdom.

Who, when, where, how much money, and what kind of means was used to gather them.

And among that money, how much did they put into their own pocket and how much was handed over to the government. Everything was written in those bundle of papers.

Based on that information, Earl Bergston planned to purge the people who were part of the noble's faction.

Many of the country problems were caused by nobles gathered under Gerhardt.

They were fanning up dissatisfaction toward Lupis, intervening in national defense, and pressuring the bureaucrats to delay state affairs.

Such actions taken separately might not cause a fatal injury, but those were things that could not be ignored either.

And malicious non-cooperative attitude was far worse than being blatantly hostile because it was much harder to deal with.

Not to mention, Lupis' position and personality also makes it hard to respond.

The easiest solution to overcome this conundrum was to purge two or three non-cooperative houses with a low political power to make an example.

Having one's household being crushed was something that the nobles most feared, but such fear was necessary to bind their heart and blunt their hostility.

Afterwards, one can use the soft method to bring the other nobles closer.

There was not much difficulty when it comes to the reasons for the purging either.

When one carries a government on their shoulders, it was natural that lip service was not enough. Every house had one or two dark secrets behind it, where it was natural to call those hidden secrets criminal.

More or less if Lupis had the patience of bearing some pains with her absolute authority, doing the purging was not impossible.

But, Lupis tends to choose the calm and moderate responses, being unable to exercise her state power caused her to fail to achieve anything.

Thus Earl Bergston had only kept an eye while not taking any measures.

Until the day the other nobles loosened their vigilance and exposed their violent fangs and ugly nature under the bright daylight.

“To be honest, I would be very lucky if all of that had gone well. After all, that plan was very difficult to do...”

Earl Zeref cuts his words and breathed out lightly.

The plan he was talking about was to eliminate the nobles after grasping their hidden crimes. Under the state law, it was a legitimate move. But the timing was very difficult to execute.

The biggest problem was that those nobles had used Lupis name for their own gains, and caused dissatisfaction amongst the citizenry.

The aim of those nobles was a rebellion.

No matter how weak they were, the oppressed people cannot be under one's mercy forever.

It was not necessary for the ruler to love the people, but one would be disqualified as a ruler if the people raised a rebellion.

For that reason, one had to have the knowledge to properly maintain one's territory.

With that being the case, there were two ways to deal with the current situation, the first one was to use state power and purge them while bearing the stigma that comes with it, or alternatively grasp the opponents' aim and judge them under the law before their goal becomes reality.

However, both measures were now already turned into bubbles.

All of that ended, when the tax collector who visited a certain village died.

“Being a minister to the Rozeria Kingdom aside. I also have loyalty to the Queen. That was why I accepted my brother-in-law’s request to create a measure, despite being not very useful, at least I could help, but everything is for naught now...”

“Zeref... You...”

Earl Bergston unintentionally held his breath due to Zeref words filled with sympathy.

“Brother-in-law-dono... You should’ve noticed it right?”

The gentle smile that was always on Earl Zeref’s face disappeared.

His words had a pressure that felt like something out of the blue.

“Zeref, that’s enough... We’re her subjects...”

It was obvious what he was trying to say. From here, Zeref’s words would run counter against Earl Bergston’s beliefs. It was not because Earl Bergston didn’t understand the reason.

However, Earl Bergston didn’t want to hear the continuation of his brother-in-law words whom he trusted the most.

Because if he listens to it, he would need to make a decision whether to share the path together or take a different one opposing him.

However, this time Zeref was very serious regarding the situation.

Even though he understands Bergston’s feelings, Zeref kept continuing to speak.

“Oh Brother-in-law, let us see the reality... We’ve fulfilled our loyalty to the country more than enough. Should we not explore the way for our future’s survival now?”

“But... That is...”

‘Do you mean, we’re going to forsake Lupis?’ Bergston ponders as if asking that question. However, Zeref didn’t pull back. It was visible that a great disaster would befall him and his family if he pulled out here.

The worst case scenario, his relationship with his brother-in-law would be destroyed. But up until there, even Zeref had prepared to accept everything.

“Either way, there’s no more way for her majesty to stand... If we cannot suppress the revolt, even the commoners won’t keep Her Majesty alive due to their grudge...”

“Which means, Gerhardt will be using princess Ladine and push Lupis out? Their legitimate reason would be, washing out the incompetent ruler...”

In response to Bergston’s words, Zeref slowly nods.

There was no such things as legitimacy the moment the ruler’s ability was being questioned.

Sometimes, the question regarding legitimacy might become one’s strongest weapon.

In the last civil war, such reason was the greatest asset in Lupis’ hand. However, now it was all reversed.

“Then we will need to negotiate with the commoners...”

Peaceful settlement through negotiation, not suppression with an armed force. That way, Lupis might take less damage. However, Zeref disagreed on Bergston’s proposal without even looking deep into the topic.

“That would be a waste. In this situation, people won’t trust our words, and aristocrats won’t easily concede to the commoners either...”

No matter which worlds, the secret of national stability was limited to how much fear towards the government one can maintain.

Either by using financial strength, the power of law, or military power. People followed the state because the state was strong and fearsome.

For better or worse, security by using power was absolutely needed to achieve stability.

And right now, Lupis had no such power. And because she had none, she held no credibility, which meant her words were meaningless...

"The cause aside, many people now questioned Her Majesty Lupis ability to govern. And this revolt would be a fatal injury for her. All the aristocrats would then support Gerhardt..."

"Is it really impossible for us to do something?"

"It's impossible. In the first place, Gerhardt's influence extends to nearly 40% of the entire nobility of this country. And there is also the current situation. Neutral nobles would flow under Gerhardt unless they held very high resentments towards him."

Legitimacy was Lupis strongest weapon.

However, in the present situation, just cause would be hazy if Gerhardt would say he wants to get rid of the foolish ruler. Furthermore, if he used Ladine as the figurehead, he could also declare legitimacy.

"Nothing can be done, is it?"

"At least, if we managed to do something to Ladine-sama, then there might be some way but..."

Without Ladine, no matter how much Gerhardt glosses it over, it won't change the fact that he usurped the throne from Lupis.

Some aristocrats didn't like those prospects, therefore people then might choose to obey Lupis and listen to Bergston, but with the current situation, such thing was impossible.

"I guess everything is too late? In the end, the judgment at that time ended up as a fatal one, doesn't it?"

Bergston looked up at the ceiling and sighed.

(As expected, it would have been better to purge Gerhardt the moment the civil war was over...)

Although he understands that there was no point in talking about the past, it can't be helped if he felt regretful.

Because the dawn of the bright Rozeria Kingdom was over in that moment.

(But now everything is too late. The brilliant future fell from our palm. And with this revolt, her majesty rule is over. If that is the case, then...)

Should he perish together with Lupis, or should he explore a way for survival?

The sense of obligation as the minister of the Rozeria Kingdom, and his responsibility as the ruler of his territory. Both were large things that could not easily be abandoned.

But right now, he must choose one among the two.

Long silence dominates the room. Zeref was quietly waiting for Bergston's decision.

Then, come the time where he needed to speak out his decision.

"Very well... Let me hear your opinion. How can we protect our household?"

Lupis' judgment. As a human being, her decision was never wrong. And, she also was never wrong as someone responsible for national affairs. However, that was it.

She's not suitable to be a ruler because she was not wrong. To put it more precisely, she chooses the right option as a person, not a ruler.

(Your Majesty... Please forgive me...)

Bergston shed blood tears in his heart. He never hated Lupis.

Although Lupis occasionally made a stupid and childish judgment, her personality was that of a kind one.

At least, in the previous civil war, Earl Bergston served Lupis sincerely.

However, in the current situation, not much choice was available.

Because Bergston also had family and vassals whom he needed to protect.

“That is sensible judgment. Brother-in-law-dono.”

In response to Zeref words, Bergston nodded while biting his lips.

Chapter 13

And the Opening Bell Rings 6

“Clear blue moon... It makes me feels like I could see everything even in the night...”

While he felt the shaking of the carriage, Earl Zeref looked up out the window.

It was a beautiful moon that makes one could see everything in the surroundings. It was a perfect full moon without any cloud in the sky.

Looking at such a beautiful scenery, the thing that floated inside Zeref's mind was one's own dirtiness... For persuading his brother-in-law to abandon the Queen and flee...

However, Zeref didn't have time to indulge in such sentiment.

“After we pass this mountain, everything will be over, but the problem is Elena's aim...”

The future plan was already generally settled at Bergston's house.

Among them, Elena's movement who was stationed on the western border was the key.

In the preparation of Ortomea Empire next invasion, Elena who returned from the Zalda Kingdom had been stuck on the border. Under her command were roughly comprised three chivalric orders, including mercenaries from all over the Rozeria Kingdom. About eight thousand troops in total.

This was the biggest force in the Rozeria Kingdom when it comes to quantity and quality.

The movement of Elena Steiner wouldl greatly influence the future.

Elena herself had various options to take. Will she choose to support Lupis just like the oath of the knights should be, or will she support Gerhardt under the banner of getting rid of the foolish ruler?

There was also an option of staying silent and watching the situation evolve.

The existence of such Elena cast a shadow to Earl Bergston.

(It would be great if she cooperates with us... But for now, this should be enough. The story won't proceed unless we grasp each other's intentions properly. The problem is...)

Although he didn't say it to Bergston, Zeref was 70% sure that his measures would turn successful.

It was true that the timing was bad. However, he had already received a report regarding the moment made by Gerhardt and the nobles from the vicinity.

(We should have had a little bit time before the commoners' dissatisfaction exploded. Will this be me misreading things, or...)

Zeref knew that this rebellion was intentionally awakened by someone. He also knew that the person in question had manipulated the nobles faction.

But he didn't know the identity and aim of that existence.

Of course, that existence being an Ortomea spy would be the most likely answer.

For Ortomea Empire who tried to conquer the eastern part of the continent, dividing the Rozeria Kingdom was never a bad plan.

It can even be said that everything was Ortomea Empire's doing.

However, this assumption could only happen under the premise that Gerhardt had a relationship with the Ortomea Empire.

(Whether or not he made such a decision... Or rather, he was not a stupid person, so I guess, he might've opened a cooperation with Ortomea Empire without anyone noticing...)

The man named Julio Gerhardt was a greedy and selfish man, but also the type who respect a face-to-face meeting regardless of one's standing.

It would depend on what kind of interest was presented, but Zeref could not imagine that Gerhardt would sell the country to the Ortomea Empire. It would be much more believable that Ortomea people were manipulating Gerhardt.

(Or was this all Gerhardt's plan? No, that can't be...)

Next was the possibility that Gerhardt wanted the throne at all cost, but Earl Zeref thought that possibility to be low.

Right now, under Lupis names, aristocrats were levying high taxes causing the common people to rebel. It was certainly enough reasons to overthrow Lupis and set up a new dynasty, but if he failed to quell the rebellion or have another country invade, even if he gains the throne, only devastated land would be on his hand.

(And no matter how much Gerhardt want to sit on the throne, he would still be viewed as usurping the throne, despite using the justification of overthrowing a foolish ruler. Will he choose to bear the stigma of the usurper, a traitor to the country, or not... That would be the question... It would be a more natural course for him to take the prime minister's job while Ladine sits on the throne as a figurehead. But still, I can't deny the possibility that all this was part of his strategy... Well, in any case, it didn't answer the question of why the rebellion happened now...)

If Ortomea was the mastermind, they would choose the timing for the rebellion at the same time as their invasion or right before the invasion began. Since there was the possibility of military suppression if a rebellion broke out too early.

And as far as Zeref analyzed it, Ortomea Empire's next invasion at the Zalda Kingdom won't happen at least until another year.

Fear that as if he was looking at the depth of abyss, total darkness, wells up inside Zeref's heart.

(I would like some allies... A friend that could help me...)

It was no doubt that Bergston, his brother-in-law, was a reliable man. In fact, he was an intelligent man, when it comes to the military and political field.

However, if Zeref were to be asked whether or not his brother-in-law was perfect, he would shake his head subtly.

Although he had the disposition of being a wise man, his brother-in-law Bergston was sometimes too naive and had little experience when it comes to scheming and

gathering intelligence.

Of course, he was a million times better than the stupid aristocrats, but one cannot say he was perfect.

And right now, what Zeref need was a perfect talent.

(I wonder, will that man work?)

Floating in his mind was the figure of a man that kept silence in the far remote area in the north.

The man who was a commoner, an adventurer, who had the chance to become a nobleman in the Rozeria Kingdom. A man who helped Lupis take the throne despite innumerable disadvantages.

Even in the eyes of Zeref who was good when it comes to schemes, that man boasts sharpness to the point of being scary.

(Well, fine... Soon enough I will find out...)

Zeref ceased his thoughts. Due to the horse-drawn carriage being stopped suddenly, and his body leans forward.

“What happened? Oi! What’s wrong?!”

His head hit the sofa’s corner, making him dizzy.

Zeref went outside the carriage when the driver didn’t answer, while holding his forehead.

Due to a small cut received, blood dripped on his beautiful silk clothes.

“Oi, what happens...”

Unintentionally, Zeref stopped his words due to the sight in front of his eyes.

Both men sitting on the coaching box had collapsed. Numerous arrows stabbed deeply

in their chest.

“Damn it... It can’t be... This is...”

The driver of his carriage were able men, one of them was an intelligence-gathering officer and the other one was a good warrior.

They both had the capacity to handle up to twenty thieves alone.

Even Zeref didn’t expect that they would be dead without being able to respond to the attacker.

“Damn it! What happened...”

Words filled with curses escaped his mouth. –

If he had too many escorts, it would be impossible for him to take quick action and would’ve drawn too much attention. That was why he choose to bring a small escort, but that judgment seemed to have been wrong.

The skill that was used to kill his bodyguard obviously belonged to trained men.

(The one doing this is definitely not the homeless kind of thief. which meant, they were trained assassins aiming at my life. The question is, who sent them...)

A sound of winds being cut resounded once again and innumerable arrows attack the coaching box once again.

Zeref quickly used the escort’s corpse as a shield.

(Only using bow... At least I didn’t feel any magic being involved...)

If it was only using bows and arrows, Zeref could still use dead bodies as a shield, but that cannot be said the same if magic were involved. Whatever attributes the magic user had, the carriage could have been easily blown up.

Conversely speaking, having used only bows and arrows at the beginning suggested that there was no magic user involved.

(Unlike my brother-in-law, I'm not that good when it comes to martial arts... But I guess, I have no choice here... I can't just sit in silence and get killed...)

Borrowing the sword of one of his dead escort, Zeref hides behind the shadow of the passenger car.

The surroundings were covered with dense wood. And it was also in the middle of the night.

The possibility of a third party coming to help him was zero.

Furthermore, Zeref was not a natural fighter. Although he had undergone magic and martial arts training, he was no stronger than a fresh knight... Even the younger knights could easily surpass him if he didn't do well.

The problem was his own heart. No matter how much power one had, if one's heart had fear in using it, then that power would become dull.

However, there was only one way to survive this situation. And that was to kill the assassins with his own two hands. Even if the possibility of success was low.

However, when Zeref was about to solidify his determination, the situation changed dramatically.

"Have they run out of arrows?"

The arrows that were constantly striking the horse-drawn carriage, stopped instantly.

Zeref then observed the surroundings from the shadows.

Silence dominates the landscape, one could hear the voice of crows from the distance.

(Is this a trap? But if I don't do anything, nothing will change...)

Zeref slowly leaves the shadow while keeping the surroundings under his watch.

"Who?!"

Zeref pointed the sword towards the sound that was coming from the depth of the forest.

The tension caused his hands to tremble.

His throat becomes dry, and his heart beating very fast.

“Please put your sword down. Earl Zeref. We’ve dealt with the assassins...”

The person emerging from the shadows speak to Zeref with a calm voice.

“Don’t say something stupid! Who the hell are you?!”

The situation was too unexpected. And Zeref was not stupid enough to accept it.

He kept his sword ready while his hands grew sweaty.

“Do you not recognize me?”

The owner of the voice gradually moved closer. Eventually, looking at the face illuminated by the moonlight, Zeref couldn’t help it but raising a surprised voice.

Chapter 14

And the Opening Bell Rings 7

“I see... So we made it in time... I’m glad that Earl Zeref is safe...”

While listening to the report brought from Tristoron city, located in the west of Rozeria Kingdom, Ryouma put down the pen he was holding while breathing out a sigh of relief.

“Yes. I heard the news from Sara, it seems Earl Zeref’s escort was killed by the first raid, it was quite a dangerous situation, but somehow Sara and Sakuya managed to deal with the assassins, and right now they are having a talk with Elena-sama. Like Ryouma-sama had expected, the two people had decided to abandon Queen Lupis. Furthermore, Elena-sama also handed us a letter that she wanted to meet Ryouma-sama at all cost for consultations regarding the future of the country.”

As soon as he read the letter, Ryouma floated a smile of satisfaction on his face.

Although Elena was a competent soldier, she was never a good politician.

If it was only one city or town, then she might be capable enough, but when it comes to a whole country, she was well aware that she didn’t have the capacity.

The content might well have been a wish to consult regarding the future, but in fact, there was no mistake that her letter could be seen as her intention to enter Ryouma’s umbrella.

Ryouma looked up at the ceiling while leaning his body deeply. A slightly happy expression could be seen on his face.

“Earl Zeref has moved as I had expected, Although the timing of him leaving the royal capital and meeting Elena can be said as something limited...”

“Yes... Not only did he manage to persuade Earl Bergston to give up on Queen Lupis, I never thought that he had the power to actually make Elena-sama cooperate.”

Laura gazed at the letter once again. Inside her mind, she still could not believe the content of the letter.

At least in her eyes, Earl Zeref was just a sneaky middle-aged man hiding in the shadow of his brother-in-law. Even though she understood that everything was only for an appearance, she still could not believe it.

“Are you surprised?”

“Yes... I still cannot believe it...”

In response to Ryouma’s question, Laura gently nodded her head showing confusion on her beautiful face.

Even though she had been told about it in advance, Laura still could not believe it that under such mediocre appearance, Earl Zeref could pull off such movements.

However, seeing Laura with that expression, Ryouma raises a laughter.

“That is also his own doing. He calculated his own appearance according to his influence towards the surroundings.”

“It was calculated?”

“Right, everything was calculated by him...”

Both brothers were well-regarded politicians, but one was a dandy middle-aged man who boasts refined a smart look and a tall body, and the other was a middle-aged man with tattered appearance.

Looking at such contrast, no wonder that Earl Zeref was often being considered as just a follower of Earl Bergston.

That was the thing Earl Zeref made use of.

He used it to carry the dark side of the politics on his shoulders.

“That person realized that simple appearances didn’t attract much attention. And usually, he was under Earl Bergston’s shadow taking one or two steps back from the surroundings.”

“Which meant, he didn’t want to attract attention, is it?”

“Well, you can regard him as a backstage actor...”

The actors who stood on the stage might shine, but for them to do so, they needed the support of backstage people working in the shadows. It was work that usually didn’t receive enough evaluation. However, it might be true that if the backstage crew didn’t devote themselves to their work, the stage wouldn’t be established.

And the relationship of Earl Bergston and Zeref can be described like that.

Earl Zeref who carry the dirty role of supporting his brother-in-law, and Earl Bergston who stand on the political stage.

It can be said that they were two people sharing one fate.

“Either way, with this we have managed to obtain three more pair of hands...”

“Elena-sama, Earl Zeref and Earl Bergston?”

“That’s right, it is a considerable helping pair of hands. Especially Earl Zeref...”

“Earl Zeref? not the other two?”

In response to Ryouma’s words, Laura tilted her head.

There was no objection when it comes to how influential these three people were. However, if one was to be asked who was the most powerful one among the three, the natural answer would’ve been Elena or Bergston.

Elena who had the most experience when it comes to military and relationships with the neighboring countries, and Earl Bergston who was given the responsibility in charge of administration under Queen Lupis, although Laura understood that Earl Zeref was not your ordinary man, but compared to the two, in her eyes he was below them.

Looking at Laura’s expression, Ryouma shakes his head.

“The information network that person has, was something Iga clan didn’t have. In the future, that would be the most needed thing in taking down the Rozeria Kingdom.”

Iga clan might have been a very important piece for Ryouma, as an intelligence and counter-intelligence body, but if being asked whether or not they were perfect, the answer would be a no.

Iga clan had members around 200 people including women and children.

Now they were teaching spy work to the children previously purchased as slaves, but those who can take up jobs didn't exceed more than 100 people.

Of course, Iga clan planned to expand in the future, but if one thinks about the future expansion, they will need more people.

Especially, when it comes to keeping an eye on the nobles, people who were familiar with the society were indispensable.

(Well, I don't care much about nobility but...)

Ryouma had pictured his ideal country in his head. It would be a country centered on the merit system.

Basically, Ryouma didn't like the existence of aristocracy.

In his eyes, he saw the majority of aristocrats as nothing more than insects exploiting people with taxes and immersing themselves with pleasures.

And Mikoshiba Ryouma was not somebody kind enough to let such insects spread on his own garden (country).

His ideal was to obliterate the entire Rozeria Kingdom's aristocrats and take the entire territory under the royal's administration, but that would take too much work.

Which meant, only one option was left.

After one sorted out the gems from amongst the stones, one can then spend the time to further sort the best gems amongst the other ones.

For that reason, Ryouma needed Earl Zeref ability.

The man who knows the secret of many Rozeria's aristocrats.

Nonetheless, it was still a faraway story when Earl Zeref could exercise his full ability

under Ryouma.

It can't be helped if people regards this as a presumptuous dream created by a small feudal lord from a remote land.

(For now, I need to immediately take my first step... Can I do this?)

If it was as planned, the disturbances and revolts by the commoners will cause the aristocrats to be unable to move their forces until near the border.

Although, in this situation they still might be able to use unreasonable force.

And the attack towards Earl Zeref was the proof of that.

Normally, one should not use such frontal assault.

Since there were ways that draw less attention, like making a threat or using poison.

Yet, they had gone all the way to make a frontal assault. It was easy to regard that as a warning to the nobles who were dissatisfied with Lupis.

In those kind of times, there was only one person who will cross such dangerous bridge for Lupis' sake.

"The time has come... Call Simone and Genou..."

Hearing the name Ryouma had said, Laura immediately understood his intention.

"Ryouma-sama... Finally..."

"Right, we will take over Epiroz..."

Hearing his answer, Laura immediately left the room to call the people Ryouma had asked.

Ryouma who was being left alone in his room, directed his eyes towards the Japanese sword that leaned beside the work desk.

It was the proof that he had inherited the whole Iga clan, who had been waiting for a

master to serve for several hundred years.

A smile appeared on Ryouma's face. If someone were in this room, one might mistake his expression as the face of a demon.

"With this, finally you will have something to work with... Do please show me your best scream, Kikoku." <TLN: the name can be translated as the Devil or The wailings of a restless ghost.>

Slowly, Ryouma called the name of the boorish-looking Japanese sword with a gentle voice.

At that moment, Ryouma ears could hear a wind of roar coming from somewhere.

It sounded like a crying demon...

Chapter 15

Two-headed Snake's Poison 1

On that day, at the border between Baron Mikoshiba and Earl Salzberg's territories.

A man makes an appearance on the second floor of the fort built at the boundary.

"Finally we made it this far..."

Ryouma nodded with satisfaction while looking down at the lines of soldiers in black.

It had been several years since Mikoshiba Ryouma, your ordinary high school student, had been summoned to this world by the goddess of fate's mischief.

No one knows how much blood and tears Ryouma had to spend until he reached this stage.

Numbers were equivalent to power. No matter what world, such fact didn't change.

And now, Ryouma was trying to show the power he had cultivated in this world for the first time. The power he had kept hidden for all these years.

Even so, Ryouma still felt uneasy inside his heart.

(Once we start this, there won't be any going back. I have no choice but to win.)

He fully understood that his existence was alienated from the surroundings.

For the majority of the Rozerian aristocrats, Ryouma was just an upstart. While for the Knights, he was a target of envy.

There were few people who saw through his power and become part of his strength, but the numbers of these people could be counted on both hands.

Mikoshiba Ryouma was close to that of a heretic for most people living in the Rozeria Kingdom.

And no matter what worlds, people hate heretics.

Nevertheless, the reason why he didn't lose against his surroundings was because Ryouma always tried to hide his powers and talents, and managed others' evaluation towards him so that they would've underestimated him as much as possible.

(No, I will be fine... I've also talked with Elena-san. And she had given me a satisfactory reply. Everything has gone according to plan... Afterwards, I just need to...) <TLN: Remember young man "When humans plan, God laughs.">

It was the army he had brought up with great care.

Thus it was not confidence in how he trained the army that he was worried about.

It was just that most of his soldiers had no war experience, except for those who were part of the reinforcement to the Zalda Kingdom.

Naturally, they possessed big strength. But most of them only had the experience of hunting monsters within the Wortenia Peninsula. As a fighting force alone, each of them had the power of a mid-ranked knight.

However, a war where people killed one another was completely different compared to a battle where they killed monsters.

A war between people was a place where the strong would not always win.

It was filled with strong murderous intents towards the others, and the desire to survive.

"It will be fine. Definitely..."

Laura who stood on Ryouma's side, gently grasped his trembling hand.

No matter how much steel nerves one had, it was difficult to keep calm if one were to start a conflict that will decide the future of so many people.

In this war, Mikoshiba Ryouma didn't shoulder his future alone.

"Finally we took the first step towards our wish. Mikoshiba-dono."

Suddenly he was called from behind by someone who was not supposed to be there,

and Ryouma turned back while showing a smile on his face.

“Please don’t surprise me like that. Nelsios-san.”

“Well now, that was rude of me. As hunting is one of my way of life, erasing my presence has become a habit of mine.”

Ryouma shrugged his shoulders in response to the black-skinned man who scratches his silver hair while laughing.

Behind him, a few soldiers are hiding their faces with cloaks and hoods were kneeling.

“Thank you for seeing me off today...”

Nelsios and the others’ views were still uncertain.

Although he had visited Ryouma’s mansion at Sirius city and attended important meetings there, Nelsios was still not a vassal of Ryouma.

If one were to describe their relationship, an alliance would be more appropriate.

“No need to be so humble. After all, today is an important day for all of us. There might not be many things we could do, but we will spare no efforts to help you as much as we can.”

Nelsios said those words and took out a single cigar from his pocket.

He then twisted the tip and bite it.

“Excuse me. Recently I could not calm down without doing this...”

Saying that, Nelsios lit his cigar using fire magic from his fingertip.

“As long you’re pleased, I would feel the same.”

Although Nelsios’ attitude was far from being polite, Ryouma nodded his head with a gentle smile.

By utilizing their physical ability and characteristics, demi-humans had managed to live peacefully within the Wortenia land. They had spent a lot of time adapting to such a harsh land.

However, it didn't mean their life was great.

Even though they managed to survive by collecting nuts, mushrooms, or hunting monsters' flesh for daily food, it was impossible for them to get any luxurious goods.

They might manage to get liquor made from tree fruits as raw material, but the amount of production was relatively small.

They simply had no leeway to make more.

What they were thinking all the time was just for living.

Of course, such train of thought might be natural for those who lived within the Wortenia peninsula.

Compared to their capacity of magic arts and weapon production, their cultural production such as luxury and entertainment was low.

That was why Ryouma had given them luxury goods and taught them the pleasure of life.

In order to get into the demi-human bosom who had little entertainment.

"This is really spectacular. They looked like the heroic army that appear in the myths of old."

Ryouma felt slightly itchy by Nelsios words who compared him with the hero from the stories of the long past.

However, rather than feeling discomfort, he wanted to smile bitterly at Nelsios desperation.

(Well, from his standpoint, I guess it is normal. After all, it is already impossible for them to cut contact with the outside world.)

An extraordinary effort and strong will were necessary to lower people quality of life once it had been raised.

“This is all thanks to many people’s contributions including Nelsios-san and the clan. I’m very grateful. After all, it was hard for humans to make this many weapons with magic arts engraved on it. Furthermore, all of you possess magic skills much more advanced than us.”

Nelsios nodded with satisfaction in response to Ryouma’s grateful words.

Indeed, no matter which countries, if their knights saw the weapons Ryouma’s soldiers had, they would raise their voices in surprise.

Engraving magic arts users were precious existences. Far fewer compared to the chanting magic arts user, those who could perform such bestowal magic were usually protected by the state or powerful merchants.

Furthermore, because the weapons that had been engraved by magic arts were very expensive, usually it was only given as a gift for a special talented high-ranked knight, even in the western continent, the three major powers including Ortomea could only have armed a team or two of knights with such weapons.

Then such soldiers were usually appointed as Imperial Guard who protect the ruler directly.

People who saw Mikoshiba Ryouma soldiers which were armed with such weapons would feel something surreal afoot.

Without knowing that the one who created such anomaly were the demi-humans who lived within the Wortenia peninsula.

“We’re happy to hear that. After all, we would like to continue trading into the future... Also...”

Saying that, the soldiers behind Nelsios stood up.

“Actually, today we would like to propose to advance our relationship further.”

“Which means?”

“You guys, go ahead and show your face.”

In response to Ryouma's question, while showing a smile on his face, Nelsios told the soldiers to take off the hoods.

In front of Ryouma's eyes, people with beautiful appearance appeared.

"This is..."

"I've chosen among my clan members those with the best appearance and ability. Please use them anyway Mikoshiba-dono sees fit. Their abilities as guards and magic practitioners are high. And their ability to make children is also great. And you don't have to worry because they already agreed for this..."

Ryouma had no words to reply him with, as he looked at Nelsios who laughed like a mischievous child.

(This guy... to make this kind of approach.)

Ryouma had begun to understand the aim of his surprise attack.

(It would be a poor move for me to refuse Nelsios-san... Whether or not I should embrace them aside, I have no choice but to make them my guard I guess.)

At first, it was only liquor and tobacco, then medicine and luxury that were rare products to the Wortenia peninsula, he was the only partner Nelsios had to perform such trade.

And that trading partner's name was none other than Mikoshiba Ryouma.

At least, one can say that it was impossible for Nelsios to replace him and find another supplier.

After all, even if they had the strength to influence the western continent, the majority of people living there believed in the Light God's teachings which advocates an outright ostracism against the demi-humans.

That was why the demi-humans had to live in seclusion in dangerous territories such as Wortenia peninsula.

How high was the chance for the territory to have a feudal lord that would not oppress the demi-humans? And if the territory managed to have one, how high was the possibility for such feudal lord to meet Nelsios?

Given such factors, for Nelsios, the man named Mikoshiba Ryouma was an important piece that could not be changed.

At least, Nelsios wouldn't betray Ryouma unless Ryouma made an unreasonable demand.

(That is why Nelsios-san must be very worried right now... Should I increase our business transaction, I wonder?)

In Ryouma's eyes, he also wanted to strengthen their relationship, as two people who lead a persecuted life, of course, it was natural for both of them to feel like that.

"Then in return, let me increase the amount of liquor and the number of goods traded including cigarettes."

"Uhuh, We would highly appreciate that. Since both goods are very popular among my people."

Nelsios' face showed full of smile, letting Ryouma know just what he wished for.

It was natural, that one should gain something in exchange for cooperation. However, it was dangerous to word one's wishes during such cooperative exchanges.

Since it might change into plain gratification and the possibility that Ryouma's mood would worsen.

But even if one didn't voice one wishes, there was also the danger of some misunderstandings if it wasn't properly aired.

"I guess it is time for me to go... Then, let me excuse myself for today. If there's a problem during my absence, please consult it with Simone or Boltz."

After saying the first line, before parting ways, Ryouma whispered words to Laura's ears which she responded with a nod.

"I understand. May the fortune of war be with you, master..."

RECORD OF WORTENIA WAR

ウォルテニア 戦記

「御子柴殿。
ザルード王国よりの
無事のご帰還。
まことに嬉しく思います」

Nelsios deeply bowed his head after Ryouma headed out for the meeting.

He was bowing as a retainer towards their supreme ruler.



On that day, in the year of 2814 Western Continent Calendar, The two-headed snakes with silver and golden head had begun to show their fangs and quietly swallow the entire continent.

Of course, nobody had realized it yet. Even those who would become the prey of their poison...

Chapter 16

Two-headed Snake's Poison 2

On that day, modest knockings resounded throughout Earl Salzberg's mansion located in the middle of fortress-city Epiroz.

"Dear. I'm sorry for disturbing you but, may I have a little bit of your time?"

Yuria Salzberg called out the lord of the room while listening to a girl moan in broad daylight.

Hearing her voice. The woman's moans and the sound of squeaking stopped for a moment, then the voice of a frustrated man could be heard from the inside.

"What is it, Yuria? Currently, I'm in a good part. If it's not important, can we talk later?"

His voice was filled with arrogance and confidence as if he was talking to his servants, not his wife.

Despite being called by his wife while in the middle of his affairs with a young maid, Thomas Salzberg didn't sound guilty at all.

If those who knew the Earl heard what he said, they might doubt their ears. Because between the Earl and his wife, many people thought that she was the one leading the two.

Besides, even among noblemen, Earl Salzberg's behavior right now can be regarded as abnormal. They might question whether or not the Earl see Yuria as his wife.

In the modern world, this kind of treatment would be regarded as emotional abuse.

If one were to have a decent mind, it was natural for the woman to think about divorce or at least live in a separate house.

However, Yuria had no options to choose from.

(I only work for this man like a slave. Divorce aside, there's even no way for us to live separately... That is something I could not hope for... But...)

Yuria herself personally didn't care about the details.

If her husband wanted a concubine, she herself had the generosity to grant such wish. If asked more, she was even fine to hand over the seat of the legal wife.

In the first place, Yuria was only the daughter of an influential merchant in Epiroz city. Judging from the class system, even though economically wealthy, the merchants were only commoners.

Certainly, there was those who were called business magnates. People who could influence the movements of a certain country.

Even if they were commoners, if one could become such merchant, then even a king would pay some respect accordingly. However, nobody even know how many such merchants exist in the entire world.

Yet, despite not being one, Yuria had become an Earl's wife.

But looking at his manners, one could see what kind of existence Yuria was for the Earl. Even though formally she was his wife, in his eyes, she was essentially the same as servants.

Even though she was prepared for this kind of situation from the beginning, her heart still screams every time she see her husband's mindless attitude.

Disgust, anger, and deep sorrow mixed into one. While suppressing the feelings of wanting to cry out, Yuria continues speaking...

"A letter has come from Baron Mikoshiba."

She heard that he was clicking his tongue inside the room.

Although he was in the middle of having fun, it seems he still managed to judge the situation properly.

"I see... Wait a bit, let me wear my clothes."

Hearing his words, Yuria sighed.

The current Earl Salzburg's debauchery just started recently.

It was the result of being tired by the strict frugal lifestyle. He ousted his father and didn't hesitate to release his suppressed desires from the day he sat down as the head of the Salzburg household. Lavish foods and women occupy most of his mind. While it was his wife, Yuria, who was the one who did the job as a lord.

In the Earl's eyes, Yuria, who was not from a noble family, was like a gardener who took care of his garden. His garden named Epiroz. If her value disappeared, he would just hand her over to someone else...

Yuria herself understands that as well.

Although it was an unwanted marriage akin to human sacrifice, Yuria herself had made an effort to love her husband, in fact, she had been doing her best for the past decade.

The result of her hard work, Earl Salzburg's fame and popularity had increased thanks to stable governance for many years.

And he became the most influential aristocrat who leads Rozeria northern nobles.

In order to support those, Yuria had taken over the economy of the city. Her achievements are by no means light.

However, the reality was heartless.

(I'm just a tool in the eyes of this person...)

From the surrounding people, they saw her as the strong woman who controls the Earl's household from behind the scene, but in reality, she only amounts to this much.

The moment the door was opened, Yuria turned her head to the side, away from the fishy smell that entered her nose.

"What are you doing? If you have a business then get in..."

It was a cold voice. His voice sounded displeased because his fun was being disturbed.

Yuria who stood at the entrance was ordered by Earl Salzberg to enter.

The moment she heard him, Yuria's heart was set.

"You should leave. Also, nobody should approach this room until I call."

After giving such order to the maid who opened the door, Yuria set her foot inside the room.

"A letter from that youngster? What happened?"

Earl Salzberg extended his hand towards Yuria while looking suspicious.

"It's firmly sealed with wax... He's really stiff..."

The design of a double-headed snake entwining a sword on the sealing wax indicated that the sender was Baron Mikoshiba.

Earl Salzberg took a knife and opened the letter.

"Let's see... Just what is that youngster going to say exactly?"



The Earl's eyes slowly traced over the letter.

Earl Salzberg who eventually finished reading the letter slowly folded the paper.

After a brief silence, his laughter echoed inside the room.

“Khukhu... HAHAAHAHA! Magnificent. This is going to be fun.”

His figure who laughed while covering his face with his right hand was an evidence that he was making light of his opponent.

“What is written inside?”

In response to Yuria asking such question, the Earl handed the letter to her.

Yuria herself actually knew the content from her father and grasped the situation, but she could not show it here. She took the letter silently.

“What do you think?”

Earl Salzberg asked Yuria who was currently reading the letter.

“This is... A declaration of war, no?”

The letter gives no impression of a lie. Reading the letter, one can only interpret it as that.

However, Earl Salzberg only continues to laugh even after reading the letter...

“Stupid... There's no way for me to not notice his movements. That must be also why he declared war openly like this...”

In the letter, it was written first a demand of apology and compensation for all the spies the Earl had sent to sabotage the Wortenia peninsula. Second, demanding to delegate the soldiers stationed near Epiroz city to Baron Mikoshiba for restoring security and order due to the rebellion of commoners.

However, Earl Salzberg knows that both reasons were just a mere excuse.

First of all, it was true that he had sent spies to the peninsula but, it was not only him, most of the nobles near the peninsula had done the same.

Also, it was true that he had ordered the spies for sabotage, but there was no reason for Earl Salzberg to acknowledge it.

Although it was written as demand for an apology and compensation, it was reasonable enough to look at the letter as a declaration of war from the sender in case the sender had anticipated denial from the beginning.

Also, it was unreasonable to demand to hand over military command with the reason of restoring order.

In what world would one hand over command of their army to other people to protect one's own territory... the answer was none.

Not to mention that the one demanding that was the person who accused you of espionage and sabotage.

In other words, it sounded like, handing over command of the army to the person who hated you. Only in comedy did such things happen.

No matter what kind of justifiable matter it was, in this kind of situation, no one in their right mind would hand over command of their armed forces.

There were two possibilities. Whether the person who wrote the letter was someone who could not understand authority, or that the person wrote it possessed a full understanding that the request would be denied from the beginning.

But, Yuria and Earl Salzberg never thought of Mikoshiba Ryouma as a stupid person.

"I think he is going to make use of the commoners' rebellion to expand his power."

"I see... In this situation, the royal capital won't be able to intervene after all..."

Hearing Yuria's remark, Earl Salzberg responded with a dark smile.

The position of Mikoshiba Ryouma within the Rozeria kingdom could be said as a sensitive issue.

The Wortenia peninsula he was ruling was a remote place where tax revenues can hardly be expected.

However, with the alliance of the eastern countries and ErnestGora everything changed. As a relay point of trade for the continent northern route.

Also, from the monsters inhabiting the peninsula, many things could be traded for high value.

Now he holds such riches.

Of course, for the neighboring nobles, such a situation was not fun.

Fortunately, it was known that Mikoshiba Ryouma who had been exiled in the remote region by Queen Lupis bore hatred towards her.

And that feeling of frustration surely would cause a war between them.

And while the Queen planned a change of territory, the nobles would seek a share of the pie.

As a matter of course, there was no way Mikoshiba Ryouma wouldn't realize his own unstable position.

This letter showed what his countermeasure would be...

"It is hard to feed soldiers by creating farmland from scratch. If that is the case, there's no choice for him but to storm the neighboring territories."

"If that man is to survive, he only has one choice. And that is to strike south."

An upstart noble, aristocrats who were ready to cooperate with Baron Mikoshiba who was seen as a heretical existence, were few in numbers.

In other words, the pressure from the nearby aristocrats and the potential intervention by the Royal family caused overwhelming disadvantages.

Even if Baron Mikoshiba had legitimacy over the land, it won't show any effects.

Justice would always be decided by the majority vote. <TLN: If by the majority, the royal, and nobles want Ryouma to be placed in another territory, then welp... That is what this meant.>

However, with the present conditions where the domestic situation of the Rozeria Kingdom is in chaos, the story would be different.

Even if Mikoshiba Ryouma moves his army and took other territories by force, the Royal family doesn't have the capacity to intervene and blame him for it.

"Fumu... I guess that is his aim then..."

Earl Salzberg deeply nodded while crossing his arms considering Yuria's words.

(This provocation seems to be a reckless choice at first glance, but for that man, won't there be another way around?... Is this his do-or-die gambling? Or is there something else?)

Various thoughts crosses the Earl's mind.

"So then, what are we going to do?"

"Since I don't know the state of the peninsula, I don't want to jump in, but we have no choice but to talk to the surrounding nobles, just in case..."

In response to Yuria who broke the long silence, the Earl finally gave his orders.

Despite sending a lot of spies, he was unable to grasp the situation within the peninsula. He thinks it was improbable, but Earl Salzberg thought it might be possible for Ryouma to exceed his military power by using financial power.

Although he was making fun of Ryouma all the time for being an upstart, Earl Salzberg's experience as a military commander was still reliable.

"Gather soldiers and crush him in a single swooping battle. Certainly, it is of low taste, but I guess there's no other choice. I understand. I will immediately prepare the letter..."

After saying that gracefully, Yuria quickly leaves the room.

At that time, Earl Salzberg felt a bit of a sense of incongruity.

The Earl keeps staring silently at Yuria's back. As if trying to probe the depths of her heart.

Chapter 17

Two-headed Snake's Poison 3

It had been a week since Earl Salzburg received a letter from Ryouma that could be best described as a declaration of war, and he decided to fight in a direct confrontation.

A cavalry party crossed the highway towards the east with heavy clouds hanging above their heads.

The weather that indicates heavy rains are about to come, caused the man wearing an armor and straddling a white horse to click his tongue.

Currently, he was heading towards Epiroz.

In his field of vision, he could only see grasslands, there was no place for him and his cavalry party to find a shelter. However, even if there was such a place, in this kind of landscape, it would be too small to shelter a party comprised of more than 100 men.

“Cih! the rain is about to pour at any moment now. I was only helping that old man Salzburg because of father, and now the weather is making me irritated.”

A large man riding a white horse who leads the party, bitterly said those words after looking up towards the sky.

Looking at his appearance, he was a man aged around late twenties.

His arm and leg muscles looked trained, and his body was twice bigger compared to the people in his surroundings.

His face looked intimidating, especially the deep scar carved on his right cheek that looked eye-catching.

Most people who saw him would first think of him as some bandit or mercenary.

But in this world, the words of “don’t judge a book by its covers” seems to apply as well.



Hearing the man's complaint, a knight comes closer to him. His role as an aide was to appease the leader's dissatisfaction that had been going on since they left their territory, without gaining animosity from him.

For the man, even though he understands something, he was the type that won't bend his opinion no matter how until the end.

Although his willingness to listen was good, his personality was lacking the ability to express something without saying them, which should be indispensable as a nobleman.

That was why, even though he's smart enough in analyzing the situation, his ability to deal with the surroundings was bad.

In other words, one can regard him as a man who could not read the mood.

"Young master, I fully understand young master's feelings but, please do endure it for now. All of the ten northern noble houses must send soldiers. It would turn into a dangerous situation for Baron Bertrand's house if we're the only ones who didn't respond to Earl Salzberg's call."

The aide's argument was right.

And those words were also the same words he had said many times before already to appease the man's irritation since they left the territory.

There were ten noble houses situated in the northern territory of Rozeria.

Among them, Salzberg house with the rank of Earl had the biggest military power and was the leader of the ten houses since the founding of the Rozeria Kingdom.

For the northern nobles, they would feel more nervous when they deal with Earl Salzberg compared to the ruler of the country that was situated far away from their territory.

"It is because of attitudes like yours that Baron Mikoshiba got angry. In the first place, what is wrong with their heads, fighting against each others when the country is unstable like this... This is also why I objected and didn't want to go... It was because my father and elder brother won't shut their mouths about the obligation to the Earl and the pride of being the Rozeria Kingdom's nobles that I got out like this..."

“Our enemy this time is an upstart after all. There’s the saying that ‘the nail that sticks out needs to get hammered in’. Besides, the war this time is not only for helping the Earl. Wortenia peninsula seems to have the ability to generate wealth beyond what we had thought previously, thus if we win this war, we might be able to demand some reward.”

The man snorted after he heard his aide’s words, who showed a broad smile on his side...

“Fuuh, is that something a knight that serves the glorious Bertrand family should say? How wonderful of you.”

It was him being sarcastic.

But, the knight didn’t seem to feel any concerns after hearing it.

“I could not help it. After all, I could not survive with a knight’s pride alone. Besides, Earl Salzberg was not the one who started this whole situation. Don’t get any misunderstandings there...”

“Are you saying the one that gets provoked is stupid?”

Indeed, that is from a normal point of view, Mikoshiba Ryouma argument was right.

For men of power, the existence called spy was the same as a thief who steals treasures known as informations. Moreover, depending on the situation they could’ve also become a more destructive agent such as assassins.

A dangerous pest that damage the flower garden known as the territory. If one were to sent such dangerous presence.

Even if the world is at war, or that it was not uncommon for nobles to sent spies to other territories, there was no reason for not feeling uncomfortable.

If it was one or two spies, then it might still be forgivable.

And one might endure it after considering the difference in power between each parties.

However, the story change if more than ten people were sent.

Not to mention, even though Baron Mikoshiba was part of the Rozeria Kingdom aristocracy, the nobles surrounding the peninsula persistently had kept sending spies. No wonders Baron Mikoshiba Ryouma felt a sense of crisis.

However, even if one were being provoked, for a Baron to go against an Earl was absurd.

As long as nothing strange happens, the difference in power could be used to justify who was right and who was wrong.

(Well, it is also natural for my father and elder brother to be in frenzy. Especially now that Wortenia has become a mountain of treasures...)

For better or worse, it was the nature of aristocrats to want to increase their territory and their wealth. The tendency was particularly strong now because the country was currently in chaos.

For them, it was necessary to keep their family alive.

That was why, as long they judge some profits could be obtained, they would gather like hyenas and rush towards the decayed flesh.

Threatening, blackmailing, use everything necessary to get one's object of interest.

(But wait... I see, did that man deliberately provoked Mikoshiba Ryouma for this purpose? If it's those guys, then it is possible...)

Sending spies endlessly to fuel Baron Mikoshiba's tension.

And then, when everything was about to break out into all-out war, beat him up with overwhelming military force.

What remains afterward would be Wortenia peninsula which had become an important commercial port. Then distribute the rewards to the surrounding nobles.

He didn't have any proof to claim this thought, but inside the man's head, the outline of the war had started to appear.

(Now I began to think something nasty. Am I actually hating such upstart this much?)

It was the truth that Mikoshiba Ryouma was disliked by the majority of the Rozeria aristocracy.

The majority of them viewed Mikoshiba Ryouma as a vagabond mercenary who gained noble status without knowing his social standing, even if it was a reward for his contributions during the civil war.

Thus there was no reason for the nobles to remain silent when the Wortenia peninsula had turned into an economic powerhouse territory.

(But still, who planned all of this?)

He didn't believe that his brother, father or his immediate family had the ability to draw up this kind of plan.

They both were worldly-minded people that were only interested in exploiting the citizen and enjoying their lavish life.

(Was that old man Salzberg the one who planned all of this? No, even if that man could draw some plot, the way he does thing feels different. Which means, is it his wife, Yuria, who is known as a poisonous woman, then?)

While thinking so, he immediately denied his own thoughts.

(No, she might be smart when it comes to the economy, but I don't believe she had the capacity to plot something like this... If that is the case then...)

The faces of the head of household of the ten nobles family floated inside his mind

But none of them were deemed to be the mastermind.

"Young master, please look ahead."

His knight aide brought back his senses to reality.

"A golden Eagle with red background... Is that the flag of Baron Garbera's house?"

Southwest and Southeast. The place they were right now was where two intersections meet to the direction of Epiroz city.

“Halt!”

In accordance with the man’s command, the cavalry party stopped moving.

The road ahead might be wide compared to a normal one, but it was not to the extent that two forces could advance side by side.

Thus it was necessary to decide who should advance first.

“All of you wait here.”

After he gives his command to the nearby knight, the man slowly advances alone and jump down from his horse.

Normally, it was not necessary for the commander to negotiate personally, However, the man kept advancing.

Apparently, the other party also had guessed the man’s intention as well. Since one man from Garbera house’ army also advances his horse alone.

“As expected, it is you the one who led the army, huh? Long time no see I guess, Signiz.”

Hearing those words, the man called Signiz jumped down from his horse and spread his hands while laughing.

“Same to you... Roberto Bertrand. I’m happy that I could see that stupid face of yours.”

“Piss off... You damned fourth son!”

“That’s my line!”

While spouting curses at each other, the two firmly hugged each other.

“It has been three, no, I guess four years since the last time I saw your face...”

“Indeed, last time we met was when we had a skirmish near the border of ErnestGora.”

Roberto answered Signiz' words with a sigh.

"Fumu, well there's no choice for us. Since we are only a baron's fourth son..."

In aristocratic society, unlike the first son, the second and third son only had worth as insurance in case that something unfortunate happened to the first son.

And if an unfortunate accident didn't happen, then their value would be gone.

Of course, compared to the first son, the treatment towards the second son and third son were bad. Not to mention if one were to become the fourth son, most of them would be treated as if not existing.

It was rare for them to meet other nobles, and when they do, they would meet those with the same situation.

Normally, such people would drop their house name and become independent.

"Look at you Roberto, you haven't changed at all..."

"Well yeah... isn't that the same with you?"

Hearing Roberto's question, Signiz nodded while showing an expression as if he had given up on something.

"Well yeah, I'm only being called when something troublesome like this happens..."

The two men circumstances were similar.

Having been born in poor baron families as fourth sons, having no place to stay inside the families, and having only the talent of being a knight.

In particular, their talents as a warrior was prominent. To the extent that their parents and brothers didn't want to let go of them.

The two were given work that was related to fighting, such as maintaining public order or disposing of homeless people that frequently appeared in their territory.

Despite being given such work, they had no right to speak in regards to territorial

management, and their position within their houses was the lowest.

“There’s no helping it. This is the only thing we could do...”

“Well, I guess so...”

Even if they aimed to take over the household, they would need to kill their own father and brothers. It might be true that they despised their family, but they were not cold enough to kill their own immediate families.

Signiz nodded his head in responding.

“We have no choice but to end up with this. Anyway, let’s just finish our job fast. When we arrive at Epiroz, how about some drinks? Since I have plenty of stories to tell you...”

“Sure... On the other hand, Signiz, you will be the one who pays for the drinks.”

“Fine by me. I will treat you to only one cup...”

Hearing those words, both men smiled at each other, then began to ride their horses once again.

“Well then, towards Epiroz!”

“Alright!”

Roberto returned back to his troops after seeing off his old friend head first.

There was no fragment of doubt left inside his head.

No one knows if that was good luck or bad luck.

But at this very moment, the Rozeria Kingdom northern territory was about to plunge into a great storm.

Chapter 18

Two-headed Snake's Poison 4

A man staring from the inn's second floor located near Epiroz city's gate, reported to Jinouchi who sat down silently inside the room.

"Yet another army has entered Epiroz' city gate. Their flag design is a golden eagle that spread its wing with a red background."

"Fumu, Eagle is it? That means they are from Baron Garbera's household. The numbers?"

Jinouichi asked the man while holding a silver smoke pipe on his mouth, handed down by his ancestors, the people that were summoned to this world.

"Around 100 Cavalrymen."

In response to Jinouchi question, the man answered without hesitations.

Although he had sufficient experience when it comes to assassinations and sabotages, it was as battlefield intelligence that he was known as the best.

His main task was to get into the enemy territory as a spy, then inform back the number of the enemy's soldiers.

Due to his training, he was able to guess the numbers of an army just at a glance.

"Only knights?"

"Yes, they are only knights."

"I see, they have dispatched soldiers as much as possible without conscripting the citizen, huh?"

Jinouichi smiled like a Buddha while removing the ashes that clogged his smoke pipe.

“Maybe because they are worried that rebellions might happen if they do that?”

“I guess so... As expected, they are not stupid enough to recruit the commoners when the situation is like this.”

Jinouichi nodded his head slowly.

(With this, seven northern noble houses have entered Epiroz city. With numbers of soldiers exceeding 2,000 men.)

Other than Earl Salzberg and the seven other houses, only two houses remained.

In this world, nobility more or less had their own private army.

Even if the country was ruled by an absolute monarch, for the nobility, along with their autonomy, the private military was indispensable for them.

Outside the walls surrounding towns and cities, or outside the village, it was an area that was not dominated by people.

Occasionally attacks from monsters happen, or the criminals that were being kicked out from a city aiming at some isolated villages.

Even with security, that didn't mean the towns or villages were completely safe.

That was because although it was not frequent, there were also the possibilities that some kind of a dragon or monster with similar power comes to attack.

However, though it was not perfect, such security still had a major impact on the economy of towns and villages.

People gathered because they feel safe, and goods increased where people assembled. Security brings energy to the people and promotes economic activity.

Although it was not to the point of wanting to live in a place where locking doors were unnecessary, people would choose the feudal lord who was capable of maintaining public order.

And merchants were particularly strong in that feeling. Since it was hard to do business in a city where public safety was bad. That was why they always look for the safer city.

Unlike farmers who were tied to the land they cultivate, merchants could pretty much move anywhere. That was why it would be the right judgment for them to always look for a safe place to do business.

In order to deal with such unforeseen threats and protect commercial activity within one's territory, it was one of the feudal lord's duty to hire knights and maintain public order.

However, even though military power was necessary for them, it was impossible for them to recklessly hire knights.

Since, if a noble family held military power equals to that of the King's, the King might see them as an existential threat that aimed at the throne.

That was why nobles who raised their military strength would always be monitored by the Royal family. In some cases, there would be a situation where a noble family was eradicated because of a suspicion of rebellion.

Which bring us to the conclusion that, military power was indeed necessary, but if one had too much power, it will crush one's family instead.

Which contradict why they needed military power in the first place.

That was why, it was common sense in this world that the aristocrats would keep military power to a minimum as possible, and cover the gaps by recruiting the commoners or pay some mercenaries.

As an example, a noble in the Rozeria Kingdom with a Baron rank holds an average of 50 to 100 knights, and the number of the recruits from commoners usually up to 500 men.

Viscount power would be around 150 to 200 knights, with the ability to recruit up to 1,000 commoners. While the Earl could have around 300 knights, with the ability to recruit their citizen up to 3,000 men.

Of course, that was only if we talk about average value. Naturally, the numbers of soldiers within one territory would always fluctuate and never stay the same.

(It is good that they only dispatched their knights, and also a proof of the feeling of insecurity the nobles held. Up until now, everything is according to the plan... As

expected, Genou would definitely be impressed by this.)

Given there was a social barrier between the nobles and the commoners, the reasons why the nobility took care of the commoners were limited.

Had there been no disturbances, the nobles would definitely recruit the commoners without hesitation.

With Earl Salzberg's economic power, and the mobilization of the citizen of the northern nobility, their power could easily exceed 10,000 men.

Although that number was still far from the normal numbers, Jinouchi who had done intelligence activity in their territory was quite confident with that estimate.

To the extent that he might be willing to bet his own head.

In the first place, the northern nobles were particularly strong because their remote territory was hard to reach by the King's authority. Furthermore, in the past, the northern nobility was usually the one who dealt with Zalda and Mist's incursions.

Not to mention with the help of the merchant's guild, the territory of Earl Salzberg had become the biggest commercial city in the northern part of the Rozeria Kingdom.

Of course, the noble houses from the neighboring territory also benefited from that.

From both a military and economic perspective, the northern nobles can be described as an extraordinary existence within the Rozeria kingdom.

In addition, the reason why they could bring out such huge military power was because they were mostly not worried about their surrounding nobles.

As long as nothing serious happens, no sane noble within the Rozeria Kingdom want to fight against the northern nobles.

Except for Baron Garbara of the east, and Baron Bertrand of the west, the possibility of the northern nobles getting attacked was quite low.

"Head! That is probably Signiz Garbara..."

From the inn's second floor window, his eyes were directed to the man advancing in the middle of the troops. Jinouchi's eyes showed their sharpness as if he was looking

at his prey.

“Garbera of the East, eh? As expected, Earl Salzberg is going to bring out all of his best pieces... Since he had come, that means, Bertrand of the West will definitely come too...”

Among the northern nobles, the House of Garbera and Bertrand were known as Earl Salzberg’s rooks. <TLN: As in chess/shogi.>

Both houses were ordinary Baron houses, and their territory had nothing that caused one to opened one’s eyes, but one thing definitely stands out.

“Northern twins sword... First, let us test how much the rumor was true...”

Saying that, Jinouchi smirked.



That evening, a huge party was being held at Earl Salzberg’s mansion.

It was a luxurious party where he used valuable condiments and ingredients generously, and let many old wines being served.

It was a splendid party that was suited for the leaders of the northern nobles.

The only regret was that there were not many women in appearance.

There were rumors that the maids working there were all beauties. but since some said that all of them belonged to Earl Salzberg and he would get angry if someone touches the maids, no one dared to talk with them.

(Well, even if there’s a noble lady here, it’s not like I’m going to greet them either...)

While cursing the situation, Roberto Bertrand enjoyed eating the chicken dish presented there.

If he was the successor of a house then it would be natural for him to deepen his connections.

However, since Roberto was not the eldest son, he didn’t care to interact with other

people.

Roberto himself didn't have any ambitions, but the surroundings didn't seem so.

In addition, Roberto himself had high military fame. For the eldest son who could not perform martial arts but was born from the first wife, he was a nuisance.

'Do not let the child of concubine inherit the family's name'. Such sentiment could not be helped, but for Roberto who became the victim, it was unbearable.

Not to mention that they also demanded him to fulfill his duties to the family in this war for their convenience.

"Like usual, he has a lot of money... Damn it, at home, I wouldn't be able to eat like this... Oi, bring the wine..."

He gulped the wine in his glass and asked the maid to fill it again.

At that moment, someone tapped Roberto's shoulder from behind.

"You're the same as ever..."

"Earl Salzberg... Long time no see..."

"Umu, it seems like you're having fun... That's good..."

Looking at him eating the dish heartily, Earl Salzberg nodded deeply.

"Well, it is rare for me to eat something like this at home after all..."

"Well, it is good if you're happy with it... Since I will expect a lot from you on the battlefield. Go ahead and have fun..."

The Earl's words were as if he was looking down at him.

However, Earl Salzberg greeted Roberto personally because he recognized his ability.

Indeed, those two people, Signiz and Roberto, were the Earl's most important pieces in this war.

“But still, do you really need to mobilize all the northern ten houses? Of course, I heard the rumors about Baron Mikoshiba, and it seems there is also some movements within the peninsula, but still...”

Considering that the Earl had greeted him, Roberto took the opportunity to ask the question that had been plaguing his mind.

The opponent was only a Baron. Not to mention that the opponent’s territory was also the underdeveloped Wortenia peninsula.

In comparison, the northern ten nobles had huge war potential. From a common sense point of view, this war had already had its winner.

“Who knows... Honestly speaking, I also thought that this is overdoing it... But it is also a fact that I could not predict that man’s behavior. That was why I could understand the reason that my wife wants to have some safety measures... Well, we will find the answer within the next few days...”

Saying that Earl Salzberg turned his eyes to outside the windows.

As if gazing the northern land through the darkness of the night.

And a few days later. The army dressed all in black finally revealed itself at the north of Epiroz city.

Chapter 19

Two-headed Snake's Poison 5

Signiz narrowed his eyes, his blond hair waving due to the strong wind. What he saw was an army with armors dyed in black. In the middle of the day such color was easy to spot, but during the night, it would assimilate with the surroundings.

Several kilometers away, from the enemy camp, he could see their flags whose coat of arms was the design of a sword with gold and silver-headed snakes entwined on top of a sable background. It was such a rare design, and the snakes' red eyes were as if glaring at the surroundings.

(Hmm, their number is around 1000, I guess?. All of them wore unified armors... Probably it was something that Baron Mikoshiba had gathered from a trade, and I would guess that he still have extra money to spend. I think it is foolish for us to underestimate Baron Mikoshiba... They said that we will defeat him in one fell swoop, but...)

The number of soldiers of Earl Salzberg which had the ten northern nobles assembled, numbered around 2000.

The commanders gathered on the city wall when they received news that the enemy force had arrived. They wanted to look at Mikoshiba's army with their eyes.

"How is it, Signiz?"

From his back, while crossing his arms. Roberto spoke to Signiz who kept staring at the enemy camp.

"This battle... It might turn into something that we can't understand how to handle it..."

Signiz murmured those words in response to his friend's question without looking back and kept staring at the enemy.

It was proof that he himself realized the words he was saying were something he

should not have aired.

After all, in term of soldier's numbers, Earl Salzberg' side had twice more. Furthermore, the Earl's soldiers were based in Epiroz city that was known as a fortified city.

They still could also hire the city residents or mercenaries from the guilds.

Speaking about pros and cons, with the current situation the Earl's advantage seems solid.

That was why, if the surroundings heard him spoke so pessimistically, they would think of him as someone like a coward or moron.

However, Signiz spoke his worries daringly...

It was like an experienced warrior smelling the scent of war. His intuition that had been nurtured throughout many battlefields told him something...

The moment he saw the enemy's army, his intuition told him that something very dangerous was approaching.

"Fuuh... Well, if you said that then I guess you're right..."

"You really never change huh?"

Signiz smiles bitterly at Roberto's unchanging steadfast attitude.

Among Earl Salzberg's army, Signiz and Roberto boasted overwhelming power and the most battle history. And it was decided that both of them would lead the frontline.

The frontline commanders in this world were those who lead the first charge to cut the enemy's line.

Their group was the one who decides the success of their army, while the second and third groups would be the one who finished the war, It can be said their mission was to directly control the flow of the battlefield.

Originally, for men, such a position was considered something very honorable. Since

that means the others recognize the ability of the man who holds the role of vanguard, but at the same time that position was the most dangerous position.

However, despite holding such important responsibilities, Roberto remained calm when he heard Signiz's words. He has neither affirmed nor denied them. Or rather, his attitude could be said as indifferent.

"Well, even with you saying that it won't change our work anyway. I just want to kill the enemy in front of my eyes... Afterwards, the old man and those buffoons that need to think..."

Saying that, Roberto directed his sarcastic gaze towards the surroundings. His cold eyes virtually represented the words he wanted to convey.

"Oh, is that Baron Mikoshiba army? Their appearance looks exaggerated."

"But looking at that equipment, it seems Wortenia Peninsula is a wealthy land beyond our initial thoughts..."

"Haven't you heard it from the Earl? I heard that they had recruited slaves as soldiers..."

"Although their numbers are splendid, in the end, quality is what matters. He seems to be quite a successful man for an upstart, but I wonder how useful those soldiers would be for him..."

"According to the stories I heard from the Earl, all of the three hundred soldiers he choose to bring as reinforcement to the Zalda Kingdom, were all capable of using magic arts..."

"Truthfully, it must be some kind of bluff... He must have hired some talented people and made it look like his entire army had the same ability."

"Well, I also think that but..."

From various places, words of ridicule towards Mikoshiba Ryouma could be heard.

Those groups were standing slightly away from Signiz. They were people who one day would inherit the ten nobles' territory. Although Signiz and those people were looking at the same thing, their impression was so different like it was heaven and earth.

There were some people who advocated a somewhat cautious theory, but it seems they didn't show any disagreement at the others' opinion.

Well, in a sense their behavior was something natural. Since they only have fragmented information when it comes to Baron Mikoshiba Ryouma and his territory.

"You don't have to bother yourself with them. What we need to do is to perform our duty."

Roberto erased the sarcastic smile on his face, then he stared at Signiz's eyes.

Signiz diverted his eyes after seeing Roberto's sharp gaze.

To Signiz, this war was just to help someone, it was something he actually didn't want to do, just like Roberto, but Signiz felt they should still do their best to win.

However, Roberto seemed to have a different sentiment.

"But still, what do you think about the outcome of this war? Besides, Earl Salzberg was a military man too... If I told him about some plan, I'm sure he would still listen!"

As a commander, he had to do his best to preserve the soldiers' life. That thought was the reason Signiz did his best.

If they could devise some measures, damage could be kept to a minimum.

In extreme case, they might have to hole up inside Epiroz city for a while to gather information regarding the enemies.

Although Roberto understood Signiz thoughts, he still disagreed.

"No matter what we say, no one would hear our opinion. They will only regard us as someone who doesn't know our place, or someone who wants to snatch away the inheritance by currying some favor with the Earl. Besides, I heard rumors that if I won this war, I would be killed."

Originally they were still alive because their families thought both of them had no interests with the inheritance, therefore both of them could become the commander

of their territory's armed forces. Truly, their family thought they both were a convenient substitute for the actual heir that was lacking in courage. Conversely speaking, if their behavior was even a little bit suspicious, the lives of these two people would be doomed in an instant.

The strong men on the battlefield were not necessarily secure men in daily life.

"Signiz, you're thinking too much, you know? Seriously, you need to do something to that bad habit of yours. You should think about your own self for a bit. We just have to kill the enemies in front of us. And if there is a trap, we could just break it by force."

"But still..."

"Like I said, think about yourself a bit more..."

Saying that Roberto slightly taunts Signiz.

A small mutter leaked from Signiz's lips.

"You... Are you really thinking it is fine for us to be like that now?"

His longtime friend didn't answer his question and turned his back.



"Master. We have a report from Jinouchi-sama that all ten northern noble house's force has gathered inside Epiroz city."

After Ryouma received the information that the soldiers from the ten noble houses had finally gathered.

Inside the command tent.

On the table, there was a map with a detailed topography of the northern part of the Rozeria Kingdom.

"Also, I was instructed to deliver this..."

He then gave a sealed letter to Ryouma.

Ryouma then put it inside his chest in silence without opening it immediately.

“I see... You’ve done well. Take a sufficient rest, then go back to Jinouchi immediately.”

“Understood.”

Saying so, the soldier quickly bowed down and went out of the tent.

“What’s wrong boy? Is that a secret, again?”

Hearing that, he saw a woman with red hairs that reached down her shoulders smiling at him

However, Ryouma was not a small child that would get upset with such words.

“Yes, It is a secret. Well, I will give you the detailed explanation later.”

Although he said it was something secret. Ryouma easily said those words.

“Fuuh, I see... You’re really a child who like to tease others, eh? Honestly though, that personality of yours has become worse lately...”

“You should’ve known perfectly well my method of doing things, right?”

In response to Ryouma who smiled at her while saying that, Lione floated a grimace on her face.

“Well, that is of course... After all, you’ve been such an impudent boy from the very first day we met. At first, I thought you were being childish because you’re still young. However, since that time, it has been a few years, so it won’t be weird for me to get accustomed to your personality. Am I right, Boltz?”

Saying that, Lione directed the topic to his confidant that was always together with her for many years.

“Well, I’m not going to get surprised anymore at least... After all, young master is going to make a big gamble right now. It would be best for him to be cautious...”

“Well, I also think like that. It is better to be cautious than being a fool that never thought about anything...”

An inquisitive gaze was then being directed at Ryouma.

“If that’s the case then, I pass, don’t I? After all, Lione-san is still going to trust me...”

“Fuuh... This boy, he got me but it irks me somehow...”

Hearing Ryouma’s words, Lione’s face turned red.

After saying those words, Lione then diverted her gaze to another direction. Everyone inside the tent knew that she was just trying to hide her embarrassment.

Lione who had led the mercenary group for many years, and Bolts as her adjutant.

Having the backing of the Guild aside, it was the two of them who decided whether or not their employer was trustworthy enough.

As a mercenary, it was their job to fight for money while putting their life on the line. It was therefore a matter of life and death whether or not they could understand their employer’s mind. That was why their discerning eyes was good.

Besides, it was nothing more than because of circumstances that Lione and Bolts were serving under Mikoshiba Ryouma.

Irrespective of any sense of moral obligations and feelings, if they judged that the man named Mikoshiba Ryouma was not going to benefit them, or he was not worthy of serving, Lione and the other mercenaries would head to another country.

In other words, the fact that Lione still supports Ryouma was the proof of their trusting relationship.

Nonetheless, it seems that even a woman like Lione would feel embarrassed if he told her that with a straight face.

For a while, gentle air flowed inside the tent. However, it was not for long...

“Well now, the entertainment is finished, let us get down to the main business. We will

proceed just like I had told everyone in advance, thus I believe nothing needs to be explained anymore, yes?”

Ryouma’s low and cold voice resounded inside the tent.

Lione, Bolts and the other top brass’ expression instantly tightened.

“First of all, as expected, the ten northern noble families had gathered their forces inside Epiroz city. Their total numbers are around 2,000 men.”

Ryouma’s hand put two knights pieces that looked like a horse on the map, just above Epiroz city mark.

“All of them are knights?”

“Yes, Bolts-san is right, every single one of them are regular knights.”

“I see, it seems young master’s plan has worked well, eh?”

“Well, on the battlefield the number of soldiers is important, even if they are just a normal citizen. If they ended up being recruited it would increase the enemy numbers, which I don’t want...”

The others inside the tent nodded their head after hearing Ryouma’s explanation.

Compared to chess the knight was like the rooks, knights, and bishops pieces that could move fast in special ways, while the citizen was like the pawn and could only move straight and slowly.

That was why there was no way to compare their abilities, but a game was not something that was only decided by the piece’s ability. Depending on the tactics, even the weaker pieces were still able to kill the stronger ones.

“For now, we will proceed as we have planned before... After that, we will decide the next move after the results of our first battle, right? How about the first battle?”

Saying that Lione smirked. Despite boasting excellent skill as a commander, her nature was more of a warrior.

Her martial instincts seemed to have sensed the bloodbath that would happen soon.

“Right, we will face them head-on. We will perform a frontal attack.”

The moment Ryouma said those words, the others immediately raised their voices.

Chapter 20

Two-headed Snake's Poison 6

“Now then... It seems the enemy is also feeling motivated enough...”

In the distance, Epiroz city walls could be seen. Outside of the walls, many flags embroidered with the coat of arms of the ten northern nobles houses fluttered in the air.

Since the enemy soldiers were twice their numbers, he understood that it would be more beneficial for them to fight a defensive battle.

Contrary to that, they have chosen to take the field and end this war in a single stroke. Both choices had merits and demerits in them but, the Earl and the other nobles seem to have chosen the latter.

In the first place, in their eyes, this war was a conflict between an upstart Baron against the ten northern house nobles. Even if they felt assured of winning, if they didn't fight a little bit hard, their family name would be disgraced. Not only will they be ridiculed among the nobles of the Rozeria Kingdom, but also those of the entire continent. After all, no matter what nation, the top are still the aristocrats.

(Good, good, this means the enemy didn't leave many soldiers inside their territory...)

There were only two choices when fighting against an enemy while lacking in information.

One was to fight a defensive battle and prevent damage as much as possible until information was available. The other one was to fight head-on with overwhelming force and strike the enemy in a single stroke.

Deep inside their hearts, they were afraid.

(These people have moved in accordance with my expectations. Well, people with high pride are relatively easy to read.)

And right now, the current situation has narrowed the choices the Rozeria Kingdom had even more... It made Ryouma feel like it was something worth the trouble to plan ahead.

All of them want one thing. And that thing was the sweet wine called victory.

“Well then, shall we begin?”

The situation was already beyond where one could pull back. After all, they just have left everything to the instincts and weapon in one's hand

Besides, there was no reason for him to issue a speech to uplift his soldiers' morale right now...

Following Ryouma's order, one of the soldier by his side blew the horn.



「北部十家を叩き潰す」

その時、
ケ빈は確かに聞いた。
歴史の歯車が軋みながら
回り始めた音を。



Both armies immediately assumed horizontal battle formation. Each army formed no less than two lines and faced against each other.

It was the most basic and orthodox formation that was often used in ancient era.

Since it was the basic formation, it was easy to immediately perform it, but because it was the basic, it had only a few characteristics.

The strong point would be that the soldiers' contact had become stretched, and it was easier to do melee combat.

Mikoshiba Ryouma divided his army into two groups, with 500 men as the front line group, and another 500 men in the rear group.

While Earl Salzberg divided his army into three group, front, middle and rear group.

"Those guys, despite them only walking, their movement is really fast! Is that rumor actually true? Damn it, what is the bow unit doing?! They are about to close the distance!"

Behind Earl Salzberg army, the commanding officer's shoutings could be heard.

The enemy speed was something impossible to achieve if they wore metal armor. And it was questionable whether or not they could achieve it even if they only wore leather armor.

Which means, there was only one conclusion.

"I see, he decided to perform a frontal attack and single-swoop the war. Here it comes. Everyone, brace yourselves!"

The front knights raised their voices while preparing their spears.

They were knights that had survived many battlefields, thus their voices and movements didn't show any confusion.

With the enemy army charging as if it was a black tsunami, their minds were still

crystal clear.

""Get ready!!""

The surrounding officers shouted those words.

The moment the figures of the enemy with black armors entered range for their clear view, the knights immediately activated their chakra.

Most of the knights can activate up to three levels of chakra. It was up to Manipura chakra.

In this world, that was proof that they were competent knights.

And according to their intentions, the chakra immediately activated and strengthened their bodies.

Three steps, two steps, one step... The moment the enemy entered their spear range.

“DIE!!”

The moment the knights swung down their spears, their opponents thrust their axes, causing their weapons to collide.

At that moment, a red spark flew here and there, and dull numbness hit their arms.

Second strike, third strike... one by one the enemy brought down the spears knight.

The knights desperately tried to grasp their spears so that it won't get blown off.

(This guy, he's equal to my power... Is this guy actually the squad leader?)

Most of the front line knights thought the same thing.

Most skilled knights were far stronger compared to normal people.

And magic art made survival of the fittest a powerful axiom in this world. That was because, the strong could absorb Prana from the enemy they had killed, thus the strong would get stronger.

That was why the Knights thought the enemy had the same skills and age as themselves.

However, the next moment the knights doubted their ears...

“Doyle, I’ll cover your back! Crush the enemy from left and right. I will handle this one. Go!”

The content itself was not that big of a deal. The problem was the voice.

It was the voice of a young man. His voice sounded like a teenage boy or at least a young man in their early twenties.

(It can’t be... Is this person the same age as my son?!)

He only heard the voice for an instant, but he could feel that his age was not that different from his son that was currently living in the knight’s mansion

Nevertheless, the competence of the young man in front of him was comparable to himself.

Because he understands his own son’s skills due to daily training, compared to that the impact he received from his enemy attack was too great.

(What are they... This can’t possibly happen...)

The enemy in front of them managed to prevent and counterattack the knights’ attacks that were the results of many years of battle experience.

For the knights, it feels like they were facing a nightmare.

Eventually, after many times clashing their weapons, the knight’s attack gradually lacked precision.

Their attacks becomes monotonous and the force the knight could put also decreased.

It was not because of physical fatigue. Since the endurance and durability of a knight were beyond that of a normal human.

However, even knights who lived like a superman still had similar mental fatigue to that of ordinary people.

(This can't be, it can't be, no, this is impossible! Such thing is not possible!)

In most case, a duel in a battlefield would be decided in a single blow.

And yet, here he had already exchanged blows more than ten times but victory and defeat have not yet been determined.

In all of his experience, such extensive battle only happened a few times, which he even could count in a single hand.

His self-confidence as a strong man. It was about to collapse anytime now.

“Damn you stupid brat, DIE!!”

His shout reverberated on the battlefield, the knight was attempting to give his best attack.

However, after a violent shock assailed him from behind, his hand that was about to swing his weapon hung down weakly without power.

Hot sticky fluid cough inside his throat.

The taste of rusted iron began spreading inside his mouth.

The knight, for a moment, forgot that this was a battlefield.

He slowly tried to touch his back. This feeling, he could never mistake it.

The knight slowly looked behind from his shoulder.

“You bastard, Go to hell...”

From the knight, words of curses came out. While knowing that there was no meanings for him to do that.

Chapter 21

Two-headed Snake's Poison 7

Initially, the two forces clashed forming a rectangle.

But gradually it had changed its shape little by little. The black force gradually encroached the white force.

“Oooou, this looks like it’s going to become interesting. To think they are facing our knights head-on, and come out equal.”

While holding a battle ax that has some characteristic patterns on his horseback, Roberto narrowed his eyes looking at the state of the front line.

“Geez, you’re saying that as if it was somebody else’s problem. We’re the ones being pushed here, you know?”

Looking at Roberto’s attitude that looked like he was enjoying the situation, Signiz could not help but wave his head.

Although on Signiz’s face, a sarcastic smile could be seen. Since this situation was something they had foreshadowed some time ago.

“Shut up, idiot... You’re the one who wanted to test our opponent hand, didn’t you? Oh? Our front line commanding officer has been killed, huh?”

Listening to the report from the gasping soldier, Roberto lifted his lips and laughed.

It was a wicked smile that didn’t show any sympathy to the dead subordinates. After all, for Roberto, that commanding officer was more like a hindrance than a subordinate.

“It seems you’ve managed to kill the watchdog as ‘killed in action’ eh?”

“Right, he was someone who always used the present head of the house as a shield

after all...”

Despite saying that, Roberto seems to disagree with Signiz words a little bit.

“But, don’t get me wrong. It was not like I want him to die either. Since he had a big mouth, I gave him a job to achieve a little bit of merits, see. He should be the one who thanked me for giving him an opportunity to prove his martial arts...”

As the result of Roberto skillfully talking to him about honor and merits, the knight accepted taking command of the front line.

And the result was as everyone could see.

Roberto could gather the enemy’s ability at the expense of a difficult-to-use subordinate.

“Which means, there’s no loss huh? Roberto. You’re stupid, but your ability at discerning other people is really great like usual.”

“Fuh... Unlike you, I don’t like to think about something difficult. If you look at someone for a bit, you can understand what kind of a guy that person is... If I can’t understand that, then I won’t be able to face the world.”

Signiz stared at Roberto’s profile that looked like he was sulking.

They had a long relationship. They did their first battle on the same battlefield, and because they had a similar circumstance, they ended up confronting each other casually and they have been continuing that budding relationship since then. Their relationship was close enough to regard themselves as best friends.

However, the nature of the two people was completely different.

Compared to the precise theorist Signiz, Roberto was more like a wild beast. A natural hunter who fights with instincts.

Even though he had good enough ability to the point he was given the same leadership rank, the evaluation of both people was completely different.

(However, Even when this man had such good military character, his ability to make a strategy was really bad.)

Despite being thought of as someone who could not read the air, Roberto was being recognized by people around as a brave warrior, and he instinctively used that evaluation about him.

And he always used his instinct to find a suitable solution, in a sense, he was a kind of genius.

“Well, whatever. I’ve got the information I needed, I suppose we should go back to it. Signiz.”

“Right. It would be bad if we get defeated in the first battle after all.”

Saying so, they both slowly activated their first chakra.

Along with their breathing, Prana began to spread around inside their bodies.

Mass of powers began to surge.

Until they reached the highest chakra they could use, Vishuddha chakra.

Among all of chakras level, which was said to have seven levels in all, it was said that turning the fifth chakra was extremely hard, and those who manage to use it were extremely few.

It was said that to be able to use it, required harsh training that was also beyond actual battles.

“Let us go, Signiz! You take care the left wing!”

“Alright. Leave it to me!”

Both of them rushed toward the black tsunami.



Doyle who was on the front line, at that moment felt the air on the battlefield had changed.

In an instant, the atmosphere where they felt dominant was being reversed.

(What the hell? I feel like a big beast is suddenly standing in front of me.)

He felt an itchy sensation as if something was crawling under his skins. He wondered if he was actually feeling 'fear'.

However, Doyle didn't try to deny the apprehension that springs up inside his heart. Feeling fear was never considered a weakness.

Doyle who used to be a slave was given a new life and opportunity in the Peninsula, being taught by the members of the Red Lion how to be a warrior.

For him, fear was an important feeling as a human being. And in his opinion, those who didn't feel fear were only second-tier warriors.

Because you feel fear, you can protect yourself and deal with the danger properly.

(This is bad...)

His master's words that he told him before the war resurfaced inside Doyle's mind.

Suddenly the enemies ahead of him split up.

And what appeared in front of him was the figure of a single knight holding a battle-ax with unique patterns in his hands.

The knight was moving towards Doyle while pushing his subordinates to the sides as if he was moving through an ordinary field. It seems even Earl Salzberg's soldiers who followed him from behind were afraid that they would get stepped on if they obstructed his path.

"A skillful one has come! Surround him!"

Doyle felt his alarm instincts instantly warning him against the Knight in front of him.

(He must be one of the people my master had told me about, Roberto Bertrand and Signiz Garbera, I wonder which one is he. But, this is interesting, let us decide which one is the true beast among us, you or I...)

Before the appearance of the strong knight that he should keep an eye during this war, Doyle's heart felt a deep fear but also exaltation.

And it seems all of Doyle's team member also felt the same.

"My name is Roberto Bertrand! Those who don't care about their life, come at me!"

Roberto comes like a storm.

Then he swung down his battle ax with overwhelming power.

Such power was possible from the result of using his Prana to strengthen his body. And perfectly controlling it using his will.

Intense metal sounds clashing against each other echoed throughout the battlefield. Doyle fights against such pressure with all of his power.

(Heavy... What a strong strike...)

Considering the handicap of him striking while riding a horse, Roberto's blow was too strong.

The handle of the spear that Doyle used to defend against his battle ax blow ended up bending, Doyle then fell on one knee.

Because he was wearing a helmet, he didn't receive any fatal injury, but Doyle almost lost consciousness due to the impact.

"Hou... That surprises me. To think you're able to block my attack..."

Doyle heard his relaxed voice that was not suited for a battlefield.

However, it was understandable since Roberto was a strong man, that was why he felt relaxed despite being on the battlefield.

"How about this? Sorya!"

His battle ax once again swung downwards at the same trajectory.

An attack as if his physical form was being scooped up, hit Doyle's body.

Chapter 22

Two-headed Snake's Poison 8

Together with a high roar, a clashing metallic sound echoed.

Even in the battlefield where many intense clashings resonate, the blow that Roberto delivered against his opponent clearly could be heard by many soldiers.

His battle ax moved very fast with an overwhelming force.

Doyle's body was thrown into the air. Just like someone hit by a truck.

Even if his body was reinforced by magic arts, normally this kind of attack would be an instant kill. And even if he survived the sudden death, the bones in his entire body would have been crushed and he would've ended up unable to move.

Being unable to move on a battlefield was the same thing as being a dead man.

If Doyle was a high ranking knight or someone with high military fame, the story would be different, but if he was just an ordinary knight he didn't have to stubbornly endure.

Normally, Roberto would start looking for another prey while ignoring Doyle who was lying on the ground.

However, contrary to that, Roberto runs his horse towards Doyle, he raises his battle ax while laughing like a devil.

He was going to make sure Doyle was dead.

However, before he manages to do that, a knight wearing an all-black armor interrupted his move.

"Oi! Someone! Carry captain Doyle back and find someone to treat him! Also, call for reinforcements. Don't let this man escape!"

A shout from behind the black knight resounded on the battlefield.

While the black knight who managed to stop Roberto's attack feels his body going numb.

"Oi oi, what is going on here? There are two guys who managed to stop my attack consecutively? Furthermore, this one did block it completely too..."

Roberto has a puzzled look with what happened in front of his eyes.

He wants to think the scene just now was only a dream, but unfortunately, it is reality.

Which caused a big dent to Roberto's confidence in his power which he had cultivated for all these years.

(Did I by any chance unconsciously held back my power? No, that can't be... But then, how did they manage to stop my blow twice?)

In Roberto's mind, he remembered the very few knights and mercenaries that were able to block his attack completely.

In most cases, he would manage to win with the second blow.

That was the power he had cultivated these many years. He had confidence in his power that was beyond what normal humans could deploy.

At that moment Roberto Bertrand showed a slight opening.

Even though he usually never showed such carelessness.

Suddenly Roberto's body was being thrown forward.

(Fuck! I was careless!)

They had made use of Roberto slight opening and struck his horse's front leg.

Roberto then instantly grasped the situation. Next he fixed his posture mid-air and landed on the ground perfectly.

Holding his battle ax, Roberto surveyed the surroundings.

(This is bad... really, really bad...)

Once again, he confirmed the situation around him, where he could only see enemy soldiers.

Men who were supposedly following his back, had already ended up being separated.

(They attacked me precisely at the gap of the armor... Even among our knights, only a few people could do it...)

Roberto swung his battle ax horizontally to deflect the protruding spears.

Red sparks scattered as the result of their weapons clashing against each others.

(They jumped back to absorb the power huh?... Damn it. All of them seems to be skillful...)

This time a spear was trying to attack Roberto from the back silently, which he barely managed to dodge.

(Uoooh... That was totally a close one. I need to pay attention to my rear too...)

Roberto who looked back through his shoulder felt cold sweats running down behind his neck.

In total, there were five black knights surrounding Roberto.

Although they were all quite skillful, their ability as a warrior was one or two-steps below Roberto.

Considering Roberto could use up to Vishudda chakra, it was obvious that Roberto could win.

But, that was if it was a one-on-one battle where he leaves his back to his subordinates.

No matter how strong Roberto was, it was very dangerous to fight alone against five people on a battlefield. Furthermore, he was behind the enemy's line.

Even if he manages to kill all of the five black knights, if he's unable to break through the enclosure, the fate that would await him would be death.

(I was too naive huh? Did they prepare all of this from the start, I wonder?)

Roberto's basic strategy was to cut through the enemy's formation and open a hole to take the initiative.

As a tactic, there was no twist in it, but a style where the commander cut through the enemy line was very dangerous, that was why the surroundings hated him for being such a daredevil. However, at the same time, other than Roberto, no one was more efficient in using such tactics.

In fact, because he had won in war several times using that tactic, Roberto thought this time as well it would be a success.

However, today, such tactics had backfired.

Although at first, he understood that the army he was facing was a formidable one, he never dreamed that each knight of the enemy's army had this kind of high ability.

(It would be difficult for me to break the enclosure by myself... It would be possible to change the situation if there is someone like Signiz but...)

An enemy soldier slowly narrowed the siege circle. While deflecting the spears attack, Roberto quietly waited for a moment when an opportunity comes.



How long had passed since then?

A few minutes, ten minutes, or even an hour, Roberto didn't know.

Rough breathing and massive sweat drenched his whole body. His favorite battle ax and armor were dyed with blood.

It was the result of him desperately wielding his battle ax and swinging it by instincts.

"Roberto, are you alright?!"

Suddenly from the corner of the siege circle, Signiz appeared.

Was it because he had gone through a fierce battle? Human flesh had stuck on his iron club, and the helmet he had previously worn had disappeared.

“I’m here, Signiz!”

Roberto raised his voice as high as he could.

“Good, you’re fine... I can’t stop and walk on foot. I will breakthrough just as is!”

“Understood. Don’t worry about me!”

Signiz who quickly grasped Roberto’s situation, didn’t stop his horse and kept on pushing forward.

Since he knew that the moment he stops his horse’s momentum, he would end up inside the enemy’s enclosure as well.

As soon as Roberto and Signiz succeeded in blocking the black wave’s movement, the retreat bell was struck from both camps.

Chapter 23

Two-headed Snake's Poison 9

Under the starry sky.

In the middle of the night, the moon shines perfectly.

It was the best view.

The scenery which makes one admires the possibility of the infinite universe. It was rich in mystery, and beauty, giving us peace of mind.

However, for the humans who lived in these times, they could not afford to enjoy such feeling.

And right now, both sides, Baron Mikoshiba's army, and Earl Salzberg's coalition had finished their day-time battle.

"Excuse me. I have come to report."

Ryouma stopped the movement of the pen he was holding after he heard those words.

The documents he was working on were the important ones which he needs to check it himself, he didn't have any reports from Laura that he was looking forward to.

"Laura? You may come in..."

Following his words, the entrance of the tent was opened just a little.

The one that appeared was a person with golden hair, smiling at him like a goddess.

Looking at her smile, it gave peace to Ryouma's tense heart after a battle.

"Looking at that face, you seem to have successfully managed to obtain the desired result?"

“Yes. The casualties on our side are thirteen people. The heavily injured people are 22 people. However, due to our medicine and healing magic arts, their lives should not be in danger. We may anticipate them to rejoin the army in a couple of days while waiting for their strength to recover. Also, from the report I’ve received, the casualties were caused by two people.”

“I see...”

After listening to Laura’s report, Ryouma sighed deeply and relaxed his back deep into his chair.

No one knows what kind of feelings he had inside his heart right now.

People have lost their lives today.

Not because of an accident, but because his orders from the beginning, asking them to fight at the battlefield.

Even though it was their professional duty as soldiers to fight on a battlefield, no normal human could bear the responsibility of carrying the death of those soldiers.

(I am still not used to it... Well, those who are accustomed to it, are those who have lost their sanity though...)

It was kind of a contradicting feeling for him.

Up until now, Ryouma had ordered them to go to a battlefield where they might lose their lives.

Whether it was when he ordered them to hunt some monsters within the peninsula or chasing the spies that infiltrated the peninsula, both cases have danger where his soldiers might die.

Of course, Ryouma had also done his best to provide some measures and give it to the soldiers.

However, no matter how many expensive weapons and armors he gave, there would always be dead soldiers.

It made him feel his actions become dirtier each time.

But in the end, this world was no different compared to his previous world.

There won't be a result without a sacrifice, the person standing will have to move on at the expense of others.

It was an awful and ruthless world.

If he were to stand as the one being sacrificed, he understood that he would feel it to be unacceptable.

However, even God could not create a world without sacrifice.

Much less a human who was not a god, it was something one should never hope for.

That was why, for Mikoshiba Ryouma, he could only do one thing. Take the sacrifices deep inside his heart and remember them, then prepare everything to reduce the casualties by as much as possible.

"Which meant those two are genuine monsters, also it was a proof that my army is far superior compared to the enemy's force."

"Yes. The performance of the weaponry we've bought from Nelsios was really amazing. After all, in other countries, such weapons and armors won't be sold for less than 10 gold coins a piece."

"Well, the performance is something we've expected."

What Ryouma worried the most in this war was : "How to protect the soldiers under his command?".

At first, the population of the Wortenia peninsula was close to zero. There was a settlement of demi-humans, but their presence was peculiar to the peninsula, an existence which hates humans, thus Ryouma could not ask them for taxes.

Considering future expansion, it was indispensable to have an army to fight against other countries.

However, Ryouma could not recruit citizens and push them to fight like other countries did.

His situation was very contradictory, he needs an army but had no citizenry to recruit from.

Ultimately, he managed to do it by buying slaves and educating them, but when one thinks from the viewpoint of cost efficiency, troops made from slaves was very expensive.

Thus he could not use them like the other feudal lords, where they could order their soldiers like insects and have them replaced anytime.

The only way he could do to compensate the numbers was by increasing their quality.

Naturally, it would become a great loss to have a soldier, which he had spent so much time and efforts into, ending up dead.

Thus Ryouma paid attention to the engraving magic arts that the demi-humans, especially the elves, had.

Even now, in all parts of the western continent, weaponry made by the demi-humans were traded at high prices due to its performance.

“Having the armor engraved with magic that made it harder and lighter, for a human it would be hard to effectively reproduce such elaborate craftsmanship.”

“Consumption of Prana also has a big influence on victory or defeat on the battlefield after all. As expected, trading with Nelsios-san was the correct decision back then...”

For armors, the thick strong material was the most needed.

As strong and thick as possible, but at the same time, as light as possible.

The engraving magic arts the demi-humans have, which could combine those two opposing factors, would make any warriors salivate.

(At the same time we could not let this information go out... Should I order Iga clan to

strengthen their vigilance?)

If his soldiers used the weaponry purchased from Nelsios, their performance would increase greatly. However, in the end, weapons were just tools.

Tools didn't choose their users.

Of course, even if the weapon of his soldiers were stolen, the enemy won't be able to easily reproduce it, he just wants to pluck out anything that might cause him harm.

(Well, for now, future policy has mostly been decided...)

Ryouma had already completed several plans.

After that, he just needed to choose the best possible solution for the current situation.

(It is unlikely that the frontline would be broken. The question is how am I going to deal with those two people...)

Signiz and Roberto. Those two people could influence the battlefield just by going alone on horseback.

The proof for that was they could even break away from Ryouma soldiers' enclosure.

The most reliable plan Ryouma could choose would be ordering his shinobi clan to assassinate them. Or induce Earl Salzburg to kill them both, but Ryouma didn't have any intention to choose either of them.

As enemies, they were a terrible opponent. Only God knows whether or not they would be willing to chase at Ryouma's neck regardless of their own life.

(However... They could be really reliable as an ally...)

Ryouma didn't hope for total dominance of the northern Rozeria lands. He needed many excellent people under him to achieve his dream. For that purpose, there would be a time when he needs to make an enemy into an ally.

(I have no choice but to purely compete here...)

“I will take command of 500 troops and go south...”

The moment she heard him, Laura’s eyebrows twitched.

“Understood. Then, what about the command of the front line?”

“About that, I will leave it to you, Laura. You may ask Lione-san to assist you.”

Laura quietly nodded her head in response to Ryouma’s order. She didn’t say anything more because she understood what Ryouma aim was...

Thus the curtain falls on the first day of the war which had many expectations intersected.

Chapter 24

Two-headed Snake's Poison 10

The battle in Epiroz' suburbs began with Mikoshiba Ryouma's declaration of war.

And the war had moved to a different direction compared to Earl Salzberg's prediction. Initially, the Earl's side had thought that Mikoshiba's army would be defeated without fail by the army of the ten northern house nobles families.

Of course, it was not because the nobles were some chunk of people without consciousness, they had reasonable expectation why they thought they would win.

When Ryouma was granted the Wortenia territory, no people were living there. And above all else, Mikoshiba Ryouma was originally not a citizen of the Rozeria Kingdom and also just a commoner.

That was why, for the ten northern house nobles families, Ryouma's existence didn't really excite wariness among them

Nevertheless, since the war started, the conflict had reached a deadlock, even though ten days had already passed.

"Damn it! Every one of them only saying and doing however they like!"

Inside Earl Salzberg house, intense anger echoed in one room.

The scene of the meeting before, floated inside Roberto's mind, causing his face to become red with anger.

Since the end of the first battle, Roberto was always being called a youngster who don't know war, or someone who bought martial arts with gold.

At first, Roberto thought it was natural for them to ridicule Roberto and Signiz because they were just a nobleman's fourth son.

But nonetheless, it was to be expected for Roberto to feel irritated by the lazy slender directed at them repeatedly.

“Oi, calm down a little bit... Nothing will change even if you shout like that. Here, we have a wine that seems to be one of the Earl’s treasure. I heard the taste matched the ten gold coin per bottle price. Why don’t you just sit down and have fun?”

While looking at Roberto who had his face turned red in anger, Signiz slowly tilts his glass.

Rich aroma spreading throughout his nose.

At the same time, he placed the glass on his mouth. Strong taste with exquisite balance entered his mouth.

He felt he had a good fortune to be able to taste such wine.

The taste was far superior compared to the kind of wine he was accustomed to as fourth son of a nobleman.

However, looking at Signiz’s behavior, Roberto flared his anger.

“What are you saying. You do realize that we’re in a bad situation right now, right?! Those incompetent bastards aside, are you trying to make us fail too?!”

With such roar, Roberto flung his fist against the table.

His body height was more than 200 cm (6ft 7in). It was also a body that had been forged throughout numerous battlefield.

The ceramic glasses and plates fell on the floor and broke due to the shock.

Reddish stains were made on the carpet, and the rich fragrance of wine began to spread inside the room.

Signiz shook his head while looking at the scene.

“Geez... You don’t understand the words of ‘waste’, don’t you? It is a rare experience for us to be able to taste such good wine you know? Even in our entire life, we might

not be able to taste it again..."

While saying so, Signiz drinks the wine inside the glass he held.

For Signiz right now, the most important thing was to concentrate on the wine taste that was left inside his glass.

Maybe because he realized what he did and the way Signiz behave, Roberto relaxed his attitude.

"Signiz. That face you have right now is really stupid."

"It seems you've calmed down a little bit. The other bottle is broken on the floor, but we still have one here still fine. Want some drink?"

Signiz then took a wine from the cabinet and pour it into the glass.

"Fine... Let me have some."

The smell of the wine tickles Roberto's nostrils.

"Certainly, this seems to taste good."

"Fully calmed down, now?"

"Sorry, that was my bad..."

In response to Signiz question, Roberto diverted his gaze.

He himself realized that his act before was something he should not do.

"Right, this is the Earl's mansion. Even if we ordered people to not get near this room, we still can't be careless. But well, if you didn't scream in anger just now, I might have to shove a sword into those guys mouth."

"You?"

In response to Signiz unexpected words, Roberto was at loss for words.

“Of course I would. If even you feel angry, it would be obvious I’m angrier. However, I think it would be the same as admitting defeat if we get angry here. Even for the Earl, it was difficult for him to control those guys.”

Even if Signiz was being recognized as someone with a calmer mind, in the end, his nature was also that of a mad warrior.

Basically, he was also the type of man that thinks it was faster to kill his companions that persuade them with words.

There was only one reason why Signiz didn’t do that.

That was because, by killing the next head of a noble family, he would be sentenced to death without even given an opportunity for defense.

And for Signiz, he didn’t want to give up his life for something so stupid.

“Also, even though it is a bit irritating, we still need those guys’ soldiers in this war. Roberto, you should realize about that too, no?”

“Well of course... it can be seen from the battle of the last few days, that the quality of Mikoshiba Ryouma’s soldiers and weaponry are far superior compared to us. Even now, I still can’t believe what I saw though.”

“Agreed. I wonder what kind of means did he use to create such soldiers... I’m really curious”

Signiz responded with a sigh.

Unusual fighting spirit and high quality weaponry.

Being good at group warfare aside, Ryouma individual soldier’s martial arts was something that should not be underestimated.

Even when they received Signiz and Roberto charge, they managed to counterattack without letting the front line collapse.

And not to mention the enemy’s high morale.

“The one deciding the winner in a war is number, they said...”

Signiz floated a sarcastic smile on his face.

“Looking that way, I think we’re at a disadvantage, 6: 4. However, the enemy number is not even reaching 1,000. While conversely, we have about 2,000 soldiers with us. If we did a siege battle, we should not lose. It would be a good idea for us to hole up and be patient. And in the worse case...”

“We might ask for reinforcements, is it?”

Dozen of knights were being left to guard the ten northern house nobles territory.

In a worse case scenario, they could use them as reinforcement.

“Of course, I can’t guarantee the territory’s safety with the current situation where the commoners are rebelling...”

Thus even if they won the war, it would come for naught if a rebellion happened inside their territory.

“Well, in any case, there’s no way we would lose, we have Epiroz here. Because the Earl understood that, he kept silent during the meeting. While teasing us with his side-glances!”

Roberto played with his glass while feeling frustrated.

Up until now, everyone believed in Epiroz city fortifications, which was protected by high walls and deep moats.

That was until the moment when the door of the room Roberto and Signiz had stayed in, was being knocked hurriedly.

Chapter 25

Two-headed Snake's Poison 11

Let us go back ten minutes before knocks on Roberto's door.

"Oi... Don't you think the outside look weird?"

"They expressly sneaked around to the south huh? That upstart noble seems to be good at small tricks. Oi you, come here."

The first one who noticed something was wrong were the soldiers who kept an all-night watch on the watchtowers.

"Certainly. Today, there's something going to happen. Somehow, I have a bad feeling."

One of his colleagues looked into the darkness.

Tonight, the moon was hiding behind the clouds, thus the moonlight didn't reach the earth.

The guards were unable to see anything properly. However, they could feel chills run down their backs, giving them a bad feeling that something was going to happen.

For someone who had gone through many battles, such instincts were something that should not be underestimated.

Intuition was mostly arrived at because of personal experiences.

It was something that was hard to explain but it was not something that people should make light of.

"Night attack? No, that can't be... Someone please go and call the captain."

One of the soldiers nodded his head and went toward the staff's room.

“Damn it, I couldn’t see anything in this darkness...”

“But still... I’m sure there’s something there...”

They had lit a fire on the walls, but the range of the light was extremely limited.

Aside from the feet of the walls, one could not see beyond a few meters anything except for the darkness.

But still, even if the soldiers could see nothing, they could feel that something was there.

Then, the moonlight slowly illuminated the earth, after hiding behind the clouds all the time, and the answer entered their eyes.

“What the heck is that? The enemy?”

One of the soldiers found something and pointed at the distant forest.

It was something black but it was hard to understand what it was.

And little by little the black thing began to take shape in front of the soldiers’ eyes.

“No, that doesn’t look like soldiers. Which means, no night attack... But still, what is that?”

People, people, people, people. It was a group of people. Because they moved without coordination, it was obvious that they were not soldiers.

“But, even if they are not soldiers, that number is not something we should make light of...”

One of the soldiers muttered those words with a distorted expression.

A single line comes out from the forest.

Which needs more than hundreds of people to form. More likely it needs at least a thousand people to do that kind of line. And if one did it poorly, then ten of thousands of people might be needed.

“What an amazing numbers. The highway...”

It cannot be helped that the soldiers felt fear looking at those people going towards Epiroz in silent.

Suddenly, a messenger came running through the dark night.

The soldiers' gaze was directed at the messenger's face that was being illuminated by the torches.

Then the messenger shouted in front of the gate.

“Open the Gate! I serve Viscount Erin Grande. There's an urgent message from our Lord directed for Earl Salzberg! Open the Gate!”

Listening to his words, the soldiers at the gate looked at each others.

“Viscount Erin Grando is a member of the ten northern nobles right?”

“Right, the Viscount is going to march into Epiroz.”

“He said it is an urgent message from the viscount's house... This is important don't you think?”

Normally the city gate would be closed during sunset and being opened again during sunrise.

In other words, entering the city at night was basically impossible. Such rule applied everywhere within the western continent.

However, an exception also existed.

Like in emergency situations.

However, right now, Epiroz was in the middle of a war against Baron Mikoshiba Ryouma's army.

Considering such a situation, the soldiers were unable to decide whether or not they

should open the gate.

The soldiers kept looking at the messenger who continue shouting while praying that their boss would show up earlier.

“A little bit more. A little bit more and we would arrive at Epiroz city... I know it was hard, but please do your best.”

The man talked to his daughter who was walking by his side.

The baggage on his shoulders began to cuts into his shoulders, and their body screamed in pain due to the journey they had for the last few days.

Still, the man smiled as hard as he could.

“Fuuh...”

His daughter nodded in response to her father words and keep moving her feet despite the pain.

Even though she was young, she knew instinctively.

That even if she cries here, nothing will change.

Certainly, there were people around. But all of those people cannot afford to help others.

They only thing what they think about was only the survival of their family. Even if she cried, those people would only pass by without paying any attention to her. Just like how they left other people to die before they arrived here.

For their survival, they only thought of arriving at Epiroz at all costs.

“It is fine... If we get to Epiroz, we should be fine. We should arrive the moment we’re out of this forest. Please be more patient.”

As soon as they were out of the forest, the city walls entered the man’s eyes.

The man kept repeating the same words while pulling his daughter’s hand. While knowing that his words were only for calming her.

Chapter 26

Castle Poisoning 1

The clear blue sky without any clouds. Soft sunlight embracing the earth and the calm winds that blew through occasionally refreshed the people, it was a wonderful morning. Normally speaking, this was the kind of day where people would appreciate life and enjoy each others' company.

However unfortunate, the world was never really fair, despite the blessings of the Heavens encompassing people equally.

And such unhappy individuals under such a fine day could be spotted in Epiroz city. A group of men on horseback wearing polished white armor passed the city main street slowly.

Cloudy gazes mixed with negative emotions such as resignation, dissatisfaction and furious anger were directed towards them.

It was like a slave directing their attention at their hateful master.

"The situation seems rough... Is everyone acting this way everywhere?"

Roberto turned his eyes towards one of the knights while frowning at the smell of filth mixed with sweat from the roadside.

The voice of the knight was not as powerful as he normally was.

"No... It is unfortunate but, this kind of thing is still better because the main streets have more patrols on duty. As for the back roads and the alleyways, the situation is much worse. Forget outside of the gate..."

While answering Roberto's question, the knight watched the surroundings on alert, as if the enemy was close. In actuality, he had slept for only a few hours these past few days. Dark circles could be seen under his eyes.

(What a headache... Just for public order, and the situation was already like this... It would be natural if this situation affected the war...)

In this war, Epiroz was protected by Earl Salzberg, and it could be said that it would be a victory if Mikoshiba's army withdrew.

They had an overwhelming advantage in term of defense, but it seemed something went differently this time.

Right, everything changed the moment a group of people appeared in the Epiroz suburbs around two weeks ago.

Suddenly, an angry voice resounded on the street.

Apparently, some disagreement occurred between the inhabitants and the refugees.

There behind the scenes, Roberto order the knights to quell the situation.

(These guys might affect the course of our next battle, it seems it would be better if I were to speak with Signiz directly about this...)

In the first place, Roberto didn't feel enthusiastic about this war, he sighed while looking at the Earl's mansion.

"But still, Earl. I would like to bring my people inside Epiroz as soon as possible. It would be too harsh to leave them outside of the south gate as it is... Don't you think so?"

That person was Viscount Baenna, he tapped on the desk with both hands. As his ranking was below that of an Earl, it was rather rude of him to behave like that. However, he was desperate. On his face, anger and impatience could be seen. Towards his attitude, Earl Salzberg had been sighing quite a few times already today.

"Certainly it is a terrible situation, I can understand Viscount Baenna's feeling. However, Viscount. It is true that Epiroz city is the biggest city in northern part of the Rozeria Kingdom. However, there's a limit to it. Furthermore, we're in the middle of a war against Baron Mikoshiba. I cannot be careless just because they haven't showed any movement for more than ten days. That is why I want to preserve extra food even if it is only just a little."

"Indeed, what Earl Salzberg says is right. However, we cannot let the people fall into desperation like this. Our honor as Feudal lords would be tarnished. By all means,

please consider the loyalty our family holds towards the Earl for so many years.”

Inside the Viscount’s eyes, the Earl could see an insanity particular to a cornered human.

Both men stared at each other in silence for a moment.

“I understand. I will leave it here today... Please reconsider this matter...”

Eventually, the first one who averted his gaze was Viscount Baenna. He guessed that it would be dangerous to push the topic any further. After he lowered his head deeply to apologize for his rude behavior, Baenna left the room slowly.

“Stupid bastard... For his people, he said... Do you think I don’t know your aim?”

The true intentions behind Viscount Baenna’s rational argument were made apparent. Earl Salzberg who managed to see through it, relaxed his body deeper into his chair.

Then, he rang the bell placed on the desk.

“Call Signiz and Roberto. It is an urgent matter.”

After giving this order to the maid who responded, Earl Salzberg closed his eyes quietly. He was seeking for a way to survive in this chaotic situation.

Chapter 27

Castle Poisoning 2

“So, how are we going to move?”

Earl Salzberg immediately spoke about business the moment he entered the room where Signiz and Roberto were staying. His manner of speech appeared similar to that of a master talking to his vassals. Of course, such behavior can be regarded as arrogant. However, it was expected due to the difference in status between them. This attitude is quite rare for Earl Salzberg, who had been consistently acknowledging Roberto's ability even when others sneered at him.

‘Finally, showing his true character huh? Which means, he can only compromise this much... However...’

Seeing the Earl's manners, anger welled up inside Signiz's heart. Of course, he understood that Earl Salzberg's mentality is due to the current war. The war, which they should've won with overwhelming power, had unexpectedly become a war of attrition. For him, to show his true character because he could not hold his irritation much more, there was a part that made it feel as if it could not be helped. However, even when Signiz's mind understood was that, it was the nature of a human heart to always contradict such understandings.

‘Calm down, currently we're in a war. The situation would be worse if I minded such trivial matters now.’ After he regained his composure, Signiz exchanged a glance with Roberto. He saw Roberto trembling in anger.

After seeing the behaviour of the two, without minding them, Earl Salzberg continued,

“Let me say this once again. How are we going to move?”

Signiz and Roberto looked at each other after being asked the same question again.

‘There is no point in telling a lie. We should be honest here, huh?’

For Earl Salzberg, it might be something he didn't want to hear, but Signiz had to say what was needed.

Signiz then finally spoke out. "If we take the safest measures, we should consider an early cease-fire."

A few weeks ago, such an action would have been laughed/scoffed at. However, it can now be considered reasonable given the current situation.

'I never thought that they would even use the citizens of the other northern territories as a weapon...'

Epiroz plays a strategic role for the defense of Northern Rozeria. This fortified city is said to be impregnable.

From the start, They didn't really stockpile food and weaponry, and because of the war, the consumption had increased significantly.

At present, Epiroz could not resupply and their stockpiles were running low.

The reason why the situation had changed so much was due to the existence of the countless refugees waiting for the gate to open at the southern outskirts of Epiroz.

They were the people who previously lived in villages and towns in northern Rozeria. As a matter of fact ,they all had a reason as to why they abandoned their daily lives and ran away to Epiroz.

And the reason for that was because there were raids on their homes, believed to have been caused by a detached force of Baron Mikoshiba's army.

Since their feudal lord had sent most of their knights to support this war, their homes were almost defenseless.

Although they had left some soldiers to defend against thieves and monsters, they didn't have the strength to defend an attack from hundreds of knights.

The enemy precisely took advantage of this information.

They burned down the Northern nobles territories one by one, starting from the south.

The citizens who lost their homes had all moved towards Epiroz.

Perhaps they moved to Epiroz since they knew that their lords were there.

And now because of the recent chain of events, the people had gathered at Epiroz city. As someone with great power and as the leader of the Northern Noble households, they had asked Earl Salzberg for help.

“I don’t like that... Now that the situation has turned towards an unexpected direction, to even propose a cease-fire would seem as if we’re at a disadvantage. We still have a greater number of soldiers, and it’s not like we’re going to starve immediately either.”

“Of course, I understand that. However, if we continue the war this way, obtaining victory would be very difficult. The enemy is trying to kill us by starving us out. We should abandon our offense and focus on our defense, then we should wait for the time being. Whether we could wait it out or not, this would be the deciding factor... Roberto, what do you think?”

“Although I could win against them any other day, but we can see that their soldiers’ skills are quite high, I think we could regard them on par with an average kingdom knight. Normally, we could gamble it out and see who would win but...”

Roberto shrugged his shoulders in response to Signiz’s question. Although it was an attractive bet in a sense of a one-in-a-lifetime gamble, he would decline if he had to gamble with his own life.

“Looking at how the northern noble households are falling apart... It’s a bit impossible...”

Seeing the attitude of the two, the Earl sighed and shook his head. Anyone could feel dissatisfied. Under these kinds of circumstances, the Earl’s competence as a leader also was limited.

“That is the problem, and Baron Mikoshiba is skillfully aiming at that weakness...”

The current situation in Epiroz was there were many people confused and proposed many ideas, making it hard to control everything

First of all, there was the hungry refugees and the city’s residents. In the eyes of Epiroz city’s residents, those refugees were dirty disturbing people.

From the usage of water to the distribution of the food, they were always quarreling.

But still, even with that the refugees that were taken to the Epiroz city still can be considered as good. There were still many people left outside of the city’s southern gate.

Under that condition, because they were outside of the city, they didn’t receive the Earl’s help.

And because of those people complaining, the head of the northern nobles household came and asked the Earl's assistance every day.

It was natural for such dissatisfaction to appear among the refugees, they had to sleep on bare soil outside of the city's wall, and despite being the same refugees, they could not get any food.

Their feudal lord could not let those citizens suffer further too.

Since even if those aristocrats thought of the citizen as tools to gather taxes, they still need to maintain those tools.

However, even Earl Salzberg had no other means left.

Even if his city was the biggest city it was still limited to the number of people it could accommodate. Food and water were not unlimited.

Also, it would be hard to arrange tents for the refugees as their numbers grew further.

And the biggest problem was the fact that these goods would never increase in the future.

They were stuck at a dead end.

As the sun set, the room was dyed a deep red.

It was as if foreshadowing the fate of these three people.

Chapter 28

Castle Poisoning 3

Extensive forest spread south of the Epiroz city.

Darkness ruled the land as the moonlight was blocked by thick cloud. There were countless tents, bonfires, and people in the open space located in the forest.

“Milord. I’ve brought chief’s words.”

A man appeared like a shadow bowed on his knee in front of Ryouma. Without minding his appearance, Ryouma asked the question while looking at the map spreading on his desk.

“Did any problem arise?”

“No, everything has gone according to plan... We can begin as soon as milord has giving the order.”

The shadow answered to the point.

“I see... As expected of Jinnouchi, his work is fast...”

“No, everything is due to milord’s ingenious plan...”

The moment he heard the shadow’s words, Ryouma’s facial expression distorted for a moment. Although his face was covered by a mask, one could tell that he was a man around mid-thirties to forties. Ryouma was not impudent enough to feel calm after hearing words of praise from someone far older than he was.

‘An ingenious plan huh? That was a very exaggerated expression but... It is also difficult for me to deny it face-to-face.’

Given the future, as the leader he could not show any weakness inadvertently. After all, Ryouma would start to give missions where they might die from now on.

However, even with that, it would be bad if he expressed his gratitude lightly. After having been lost in thought for a while, Ryouma shrugged his shoulders a little bit in response to the shadow's words while feeling itchy.

After all, a silent attitude was far more eloquent than answering poorly.

(Now, we just have to wait for the bomb inside Epiroz city to explode... How long it would take for it take?...)

Ryouma put a black horse on top of Epiroz city drawn on the map.

The black horse piece with Baron Mikoshiba's coat of arms was placed in front of ten small white horses pieces.

There was dozens of pieces placed on the map. Each piece represents several hundred to several thousand soldiers.

(Will Elena-san abandon Tristron's defense and move to capture Epiroz?)

On the map, other than the black and white pieces, there were three pieces with no color on it.

Black stood for an ally, and white stood for enemies, while no-color stood for neutrality.

In the meantime, it went without saying that the smallest number of pieces placed on the map were the black pieces.

(If it is only to win this war, I could do it by just calling Elena-san but... Looking at the bomb that is going to explode, such decision would be regarded as poor tactics. And considering Lupis might also send reinforcement, should we leave it as it is?)

Tristron city was located in the western region of the Rozeria Kingdom. There were several black pieces placed on it.

The largest numbers of troops were located on Pireaus, the royal capital of the Rozeria Kingdom.

Of course, the number of the black pieces was overwhelmingly smaller compared to the Rozeria Kingdom's aristocrats combined force, and the advantaged soldiers placed

on Pireaus city were not just its military power. There were secret dealings between Elena and Ryouma.

That was why Ryouma placed black pieces on Tristrion. People who knew about it was extremely limited. Of course, Lupiz and her closest aides who didn't know about it, they naturally thought of Elena as their ally. Her piece was very important for deciding on offence and defence.

(The problem was whether or not the Kingdom would send reinforcements... For now, I would need to pull back when Lupiz makes even the smallest movement... considering that, I should take Epiroz as soon as possible...)

All the strategies that Ryouma made was very flexible. His approach was to control the risk of failure by simultaneously proceeding with multiple plans.

"Thank you for your hard work, go and call Mike for me. Also, tell Jinnouchi that he should start the next plan after three days have passed. Then we will move in concert."

"Understood."

The shadow figure melted into the darkness once again after he nodded his head slightly in response to Ryouma's order.

Chapter 29

Castle Poisoning 4

Mike who was doing document work in his own tent felt a faint disturbance.

With how the situation was, it was normal for him to be wary of assassination, but the place he was currently presiding was the base camp where many allied soldiers also located.

Furthermore, as a senior officer, he was being protected by the Iga-clan shadows hidden in the darkness.

Assassins who could break through this kind of defensive line could be counted on one hand.

And it would be very unlikely for people to hire assassins aiming at Mike's life who was just an aide. If they could hire those kinds of people, they should've aimed at Mikoshiba Ryouma life instead.

Which left him with one answer.

"Is there something you need?"

Without moving his line of sight from the document he was working on, he asked a question.

Following his question, one man kneeled in front of Mike.

"Pardon me for disturbing you this late. Young Master is calling..."

"Young master? I see, did he received contact from EPiroz?"

Mike responded to the messenger calmly.

At first, he was always panicked when the messengers came, but over time, he got used

to it.

“Yes. After master received the news from the chief, he requested for me to call Mike-dono.

“I see, which mean, the news from Jinouchi-dono is good.”

The shadow responded to Mike’s remark with silence.

It was extremely rare for these kinds of people to talk more than necessary.

Of course, they didn’t abandon human feelings such emotions and desires, it was just they rarely showed them during a mission.

“Did young master said anything else?”

“No. I was only told to call Mike-dono.”

“I see... Alright. Good work.”

After responding to Mike’s word with a small nod, the shadow figure once again melted into the darkness.

“Fuh... I guess everything has gone according to young master’s expectation eh? The problem is after this...”

After quickly putting away the documents on his desk, he sat down deeply in his chair and gazed toward the ceiling.

Mike was deep in thought while gazing into nothing.

Usually, since he was being called by his lord, he should’ve gone as soon as possible.

But, compared to other lords, the one Mike was currently serving had unique characteristics.

‘Have anything in mind? Is there any problem? How does it work? Is there any risk? What is the merit?’

Ryouma's way of seeking opinions from others after considering various factors would never allow Mike to think that he was just being called for nothing.

(How should we move now? Epiroz movement was just like young master had expected. If we keep on the offensive with Jinnouchi's cooperation, we could win... But, the damage on our side would be bigger...)

It was true that getting a victory in this war was Ryouma's ultimate goal, but the way to win the war was also important.

At the very least, Ryouma didn't want to waste troops by forcing into Epiroz if he could win another way.

(Furthermore, we had to prepare for the next war...)

If Ryouma won the war, he would control the northern part of the Rozeria Kingdom.

In other words, he will dismantle the northern nobles household and take away their territory.

What became of that was Baron Mikoshiba would be occupying nearly a quarter of the Rozeria Kingdom.

With such territory, he could create a principality.

But, the Rozeria Kingdom's Queen, Lupiz Rozerianuz, would never allow such a thing to happen.

(At that time, I never thought the situation would become like this...)

The memory caused a bitter feeling inside Mike's chest.

At first the two people, Mikoshiba Ryouma, and Lupiz were close associates, helping each other during the civil war.

The mercenary group that was led by Ryouma and Lione needed a powerful backer after they ended up being pursued by Fulzad's guild leader.

At the same time, Lupis needed someone who was capable of breaking the disadvantaged

situation she was in.

Someone capable but have no power, and someone with power but didn't have the ability.

It was without a doubt heaven providence had destined those two people to met.

And if their relationship remained good, the story would've turned into an epic hero [saga].

However, the honeymoon didn't last long.

Their relationship ended right after the civil war was over.

(Well, it's not like I don't understand Queen Lupiz feeling...)

From the moment he was born, Mike had lived in this harsh world, thus he could understand the fear Lupiz had felt.

It was not certain whether Lupiz had thought about it herself or she was being advised by someone else but, Lupiz had tried to seal Mikoshiba Ryouma by placing him in the Wortenia peninsula and try to let him died there.

For rulers, there was nothing more horrible than a capable people with low social status.

More so when the world was in chaotic times.

In such situations, even parents, and brothers could not trust each other unconditionally.

That was why only two choices remained for rulers when they had capable people but were unable to trust them.

One option was to kill the capable person or confine the person to a place where he/she could never raise in power.

Following that thought, Lupiz decision was not wrong.

Since she thought that Ryouma would not cause her trouble in the future, she didn't think of assassinating him.

However, such a decision was proven wrong.

And after she missed the window to kill him, the crack between their relationship widen.

And the snake she let go in the field had sharpened its poison.

After Mike arranged his mind together, he slowly raised his body and left the tent.

“The moon looks beautiful...”

Mike smiled while looking at the full moon after it breaks through the clouds.

It was as if the moon told him about the future war that was going to happen...

Chapter 30

Castle Poisoning 5

There was a limit to every person's patience.

No matter how tough that person was, there was always the limit to it.

And the problem was sometimes people didn't realize their own limit.

Unfortunately, that was also something one cannot easily express in numerical value just like in a game.

In the same way, the human mind also could easily exceed its boiling point. It was just a matter of timing.

It was a condition that was usually called as someone going berserk. Actions and words that usually never came out, unconsciously appeared.

Then such anger and dissatisfaction could also spread to other people easily.

Just like a plague, it would attack people's minds one by one.

Right now, the flame of malice and hatred were prevailing throughout the kingdom of Rozeria.

And currently, the atmosphere in Epiroz is coming to boiling point.

Because of the words of a certain man.

Inside the fortified city. There was a bar located in a corner of the downtown area. –

Although the place was not a slum, it was a place where poor people gathered.

The bar was a place that gave dreams to such poor people.

However, it now had become the place where a feelings of malice and dissatisfaction gathered.

All of this started after many refugees appeared outside of the fortified city.

“Uuuh, fuck...”

One man groaned inside the bar.

Usually, the bar was filled with the vigorously cheerful drunkards who would come back from work, but today, only cursing could be heard inside the bar.

Many men with dangerous eyes were inside the bar.

In the meantime, nearly ten girls were running around busily.

“Anna. I’m sorry but, could you find something that could replace the bandage? Also, hot water. After all, our shop alone can’t handle all this. Call the people from the neighborhood for help, and be quick. You, call the doctor. Hurry up!”

While tearing a man’s shirt that covered the wound, a woman with a good physique called out to a dumbfounded young woman.

Although her way of doing things might be a little doubtful when compared to a professional doctor, because she was the proprietress of the bar, she knew how to handle injured people.

After taking off the man’s shirt, blood could be seen flowing out from the wound, following the heartbeat of the man.

“It seems it got to your artery... This is going to be hurt a little, but just bear with it.”

The proprietress then pressed both her hands dyed with blood on the wounded arm. Although she didn’t manage to stop the blood flow completely it could be said the amount of blood spilling out was reduced.

Besides, if a person could stop the blood flow by doing such a thing, one didn’t need a doctor to begin with.

(There’s no response...)

Despite her hands pressuring his wound, the man’s reaction was weak. His consciousness seemed cloudy, and his eyes didn’t have power.

“Okami-san... How is he?”

The second woman gripped her hands, like a prayer, in front of her chest, asked the proprietress while trembling.

Maybe because she felt it was her fault, regret and guilt could be seen on the woman’s face.

Her face looked pale, and tears dropped down her cheeks.

“It’s fine, and get a hold of yourself alright? Even if you keep on talking, nothing will change. If you want to help this kid then move!”

The proprietress shouted at the woman who kept standing in utter shock.

(This is hopeless... His body is gradually becoming cold... Even with a magic potion, his fate might won’t change...)

His heartbeat weakened, and blood coming out of his wound also began to lose its momentum.

It was proof that death was creeping under the man’s life.

“Big Brother!”

Suddenly the bar door was opened vigorously, a young man jumped into the bar.

The surrounding people gaze naturally fell upon him.

His face was very similar to the man lying on the floor.

“Oi! Where is my big brother?”

A woman called to him fearfully.

“Alan... I’m sorry...”

“Janis...”

The moment he saw the Janis' face, Alan immediately understood the situation.

It was only the other day that Alan's lover, Janis, came to help refugees by distributing supplies.

Due to the prolonged war, even Earl Salzberg who was said to be intolerant to the commoners had to move his butt and help the refugees for the sake of the northern ten nobles household alliance.

And there was also the fact that Baron Mikoshiba army didn't attack more aggressively.

The Earl who supposedly was not able to care for the citizen of the city began to distribute food twice a day.

And for helping the distribution, Janis got paid for a small fee. Many told her to stop but she ignored them.

Alan grasped his fists tightly and stood there.

(This is the worst... I was worried that this might happen... we should've stopped Janis...)

As a matter of fact, there was a good reason why the neighborhood warned Janis to stop.

There was an endless reason for it, but the biggest problem was because of the deterioration of security within Epiroz city.

A crowd of people flocked from the whole Rozeria's northern territory. Even if Epiroz was famous as a fortified city, it was hard to accommodate all of them.

Most of the people were escaping only with the clothes they were wearing, it was difficult for them to stay in an inn, and it was also impossible for them to rent a house. Inevitably, many refugees couldn't even have a roof to protect them from the wind and rain.

Gradually they began to stay in the dark alleys. Where the many poor people lived, a place where the eyes of the security guards didn't reach.

It was quite normal for conflicts between refugees and citizens to occur.

Their thought of their future.

Their endless hunger and thirst.

And their anger toward the society that didn't help them.

If such negative feeling took a root, even a normal citizen could turn into a horrible monster.

To be honest, Alan didn't even know what was the problem that started it all. No, even the proprietress who always had some information couldn't know everything, and it was not like anybody would go and investigate it further.

But, the thing that caused the hostility became clear was when the two sides collided over the use of a certain water well.

Whom among them should use it first?

Before anyone knew what was going on, hostility flared up, and the conflict that was only a fight between women who come to draw water turned into an all-out uproar, causing the guard knights to come and suppress the uproar, pulling dozen of injured people from both sides.

Most of them when asked why all of this happened, their answer was something silly.

It was not like they were children, the incident could have been avoided if they tried to compromise with each other.

However, once they fought, due to the overflowing malice and hostility they ignored such logical reasoning.

And, if they could not recognize the other side as their own, the ending would be disastrous.

Just like what happened now.

A refugee called out to Janis who just got back from work.

It was uncertain what was the reason the youth called Janis, whether it was to thank

her or was it due to ulterior motives, no one knew.

The problem was the youth who called Janis was someone from the back alleys.

Then, young people from the slums who were part of the vigilante corps saw the scene.

It was unpleasant for them who admired Janis watched her being touched by the refugees.

At first, it was just a voice of warning, but then it escalated to insulting words. After that, it developed into a brawl between the refugees and the vicinity citizens.

And now, Alan's brother who was trying to stop the brawl ended up being stabbed in the middle of the confusion.

"Big brother, it is me. Can you hear me? Oi?!"

Power escaped from the hand that Alan grasped.

Alan desperately shaking his shoulders, and shouting at his ears, there was no answer.

"Oi, Big Brother! Big Brother!"

Alan's desperate attempt didn't help, and life started to fade away from the man lying on the ground.

Everyone was watching Alan silently trembling beside his brother.

After a while...

"I can't bear this anymore! I will make them pay! They act as if they own the place! The same as their feudal lord. Why should we endure this kind of thing?!" Inside the bar, a man shouted

That was the voice that represented the citizens' grief.

And that was the trigger to the last phase of this war.

Chapter 31

Castle Poisoning 6

That night, a myriad of torches flowed through the streets towards the castle like a river of lava.

Jeers and angry roars dominated Epiroz city's atmosphere.

"It has begun, at least... exactly like that person said..." Signiz gently closed the window curtain.

He sat down deeply in the chair and took the letter placed on the desk.

Emotions that sprung out from his heart were a mix of anger, sadness, and guilt.

Such feelings filled Signiz's heart like a muddy water.

(Everything was known in advance... He planted the feuds between the refugees and the citizens of Epiroz. Afterwards just waiting for the balance to be broken. There were no difficulties for that man)

Anyone would desperately protect one's family.

In this world, there was no paradise, only a hell like place that was similar to the place told by the followers of the light God.

And that was also no different for Signiz, considered as one of the best knights in the Rozeria Kingdom.

In this world, weak and foolish people only existed for being used and stepped on.

(In the end, everything moved according to that man's intentions. What's important now is how should I move afterwards...)

A scene that had transpired weeks ago appeared inside his mind.

Just right after the war began, Signiz Garbera received contact by one of Mikoshiba

Ryouma's subordinates.

A masked man wearing all black clothing entered the place where Signiz resided just like a shadow.

Especially during the wartime like this where security would be doubled, such a task would be difficult to perform. The intruder was definitely an expert. And from him, Signiz who was already placed his hand on his sword heard a whisper. The shadow asked, together with Roberto Bertrand, would you like to serve Mikoshiba Ryouma? Of course, at the time, Signiz laughed at the intruder's suggestion.

Even if the soldiers led by Mikoshiba Ryouma had extraordinary quality, that alone could not decide the victor of the war.

Above all else, there was also circumstances where Signiz could not betray the Garbera family.

As long as there was such circumstances, he could not betray Earl Salzberg who the Garbera family was loyal to.

(I guess. It would be naïve of me to think that everything would end just like that huh?)

That night, when the many refugees appeared from the south of Epiroz, the shadow man appeared once again, he had delivered a letter then disappeared.

When he read the letter, Signiz was undeniably shocked.

At first, he doubted the contents of the letter, but soon he was disheartened after learning it was the truth, he soon realized that he had arrived at the crossroad that would decide his future.

(It is true that since grandfather died, I don't care about the current Garbera family... But it is also a fact that I have some obligation and gratitude towards the Earl.)

The dark emotions that he hid in the depths of his heart since childhood appeared for a moment.

Signiz was the sixth son of the Garbera's family, but he was not the child of the legal wife.

In short, he was a child of a mistress.

Signiz was a child born from a commoner woman that his father slept with just once when he was playing around.

Well, in this world, contraception was rare. It was natural for a child to be born easily.

Naturally, Signiz's father asked his mother to abort him.

After all, although Baron was the lowest noble, the difference in status between noble and commoner was still huge.

Furthermore, the man already had children from his legal wife and his concubines.

If Signiz was the second or third son, then Signiz might still have value as spare successor. However, as a sixth son, his value was very low.

And if Signiz's mother was the daughter of a powerful merchant or knight, it would be different, but since his mother was just a commoner, he could not receive help from his mother's house.

To avoid a crisis of succession, it might have been right for Signiz's father to ask his mother to abort him.

And it also might be better for Signiz mother to have done just that.

Since she was a commoner, she could not even become a concubine. Even if Signiz's father wanted it, it would be not a good idea considering the conflict that would occur.

If they took the wrong step, Signiz might get rolled up in the struggle between the legal wife and the concubines who wanted their sons to be the successor.

Thus, Signiz became an unwanted child.

Normally, a child like Signiz wouldn't be able to even be born then. Until the previous Baron Garbera who was known as a wise person said the final words...

Ignoring the normal custom, Signiz was taken over and recognized as an official sixth

child.

Was it because the previous Baron felt pity towards him, or was it because he felt something else, nobody knows. Signiz could not confirm the answer now.

However, at least Signiz didn't waste the life his grandfather had saved and trained hard in the art of military and literacy. For the sake of triumph over his indifferent father and cold step-mothers.

As a result, Signiz grew up as one of the best knights.

Without knowing that such thing would lead to further tragedy.

(I desperately worked hard so that I could find a place among them... But as the results of my work hard, I've become a potential enemy of Garbera family instead.)

People with weak positions strove to win a place to stay. That would be the normal route.

However, the reality was not a kind story.

For the Garbera's family who persecuted him, Signiz's desperate effort could only be seen as an eyesore and the root of fear for them.

And such thoughts were natural...

Since they would be worried if he would retaliate for all the mistreatment he received in the past. The stronger and more famous Signiz became, the greater the risk the others felt.

Yet they could not kill Signiz nor destroy him. Signiz's ability and fame directly affected how powerful the Garbera house's army was. Of course, for that reason, they should also be worried. However, they soon noticed. Signiz's biggest weakness...

(As far as the letter said, Elmeda seems to be safe.)

It was the handwriting of the nanny that had taken care of him since childhood.

Although he might mistake the handwriting of his real parents, there was no way he could mistake the letter written by the nanny that raised him, Elmeda.

Dignified letters were written on the paper. –

And from the writing, it was easy to see that she was safe.

(Other than telling she is safe, nothing is written. But, since Baron Mikoshiba subordinate was the one who delivered this letter... That means only one thing...)

In a sense, for Signiz, Elmeda was his only family member.

He didn't feel any affection from his father or mother, but Elmeda was different. For her sake, Signiz would be ready to die.

"Signiz... it's me, Roberto. The situation seems to have turned bad. We need to move immediately."

Suddenly, the room's door was being opened in a hurry.

Maybe because Roberto saw the situation outside he came all the way to Signiz's room.

Rough breathing could be heard coming from him.

(To come in a hurry like that... You're really a good guy, Roberto.)

Standing in front of Signiz was his best friend who was indifferent toward society. A man that supposedly was not being recognized by the nobles in this war. Signiz himself also had heard Roberto's frustrations from his own mouth. However, even though he hated the nobles, he still came running after seeing the crisis that the Earl faced. Signiz could see that Roberto actions didn't stem from his sense of responsibility as one of the commanders, but in fact, as the proof that he longed for, an acknowledgment from Earl Salzberg while also cursing his surroundings and his own father.

(I have no choice but to prepare for the worst huh...)

Signiz raised his body from the chair, and took a white paper chartulae from the desk drawer.

(Roberto... Before the war, you said that I should think about myself more... I'm sorry, but I think I will accept your suggestion. I will accept your judgment after everything

is over... Even if you want my neck...)

“Alright, we will go. But wait a moment...”

As he said that he placed two glass on the table and secretly put the contents inside the chartulae into one of the glass.

Chapter 32

Castle Poisoning 7

That night, Earl Salzberg was sitting inside his study room, while outside, the noise had grown louder... He now wore the armor that he had not worn for many years, besides his chair, his beloved sword leaned. Numerous bottles of alcohol scattered around the room.

If he was an ordinary man, he would have been drunk and then fallen asleep by now. However, Earl Salzberg's mind was still clear, his eyes were like a beast staring at the ceiling...

(It has been a long time since I felt this burning heart...)

The same feeling he felt every day until the day he robbed the household from his own father. It was an instinct akin to that of a sixth sense. An intuition which human beings would have after going through life and death situations many times.

(At that time, I hated this kind of feeling, but...)

Earl Salzberg's father was a man of virtue and loyalty. He was also intelligent and had personality liked by other people. As a lord, and as a warrior, Earl Salzberg could not deny that his father's competence was above the standard. However, for Earl Salzberg, his father was not someone he would respect. That day, the admiration he held toward his father for many years was shattered.

(Fumu... Finally, you come...)

Earl Salzberg felt that his guest had finally come. He didn't feel the anger he had since the war broke. Only a sense of preparedness, and acceptance of his destiny.

"Come in. The door is not locked."

After the door being opened, Earl Salzberg immediately opened his mouth.

“Hoo... I thought you would be hesitating for a bit but... I wonder if that is because you’re being bold or not thinking?”

Looking at the man who appeared in front of him, Earl Salzberg smiled. Certainly, just like Earl Salzberg said, this place was supposedly the enemy stronghold. It would be natural for him to use surprise attack instead. From that point of view, it was indeed foolish of him to enter from the front door normally.

“Well, I guess you’re not someone that foolish. Since I believe that you’re not a boring man that would perform such cheap trick.”

Hitting the mark, Ryouma scratched his head looking embarrassed.

“Well, I guess after being told that much, I have nothing to say in return...”

Earl Salzberg laughed after hearing Ryouma’s reply.

“Long time no see. Baron Mikoshiba. The last time we meet, was it during the time you were about to head towards the Zalda Kingdom as a reinforcement? What happened to those two sisters who always followed you around? I don’t see them...”

“That is right. At that time, I’ve received a great favor from you. Those two are currently doing some errands I’ve ordered them to do...”

Responding Earl Salzberg question Ryouma lowered his head and answering with a smile. Although he had paid a huge amount of money toward the Earl as intermediate, Ryouma who had no connection at all was without a doubt greatly benefited from his relationship with the Earl. In a sense, Earl Salzberg was a benefactor of Ryouma. While looking happy at Ryouma’s attitude, Earl Salzberg opened his mouth.

“I see, you seem to have some trouble of your own too huh?”

“Indeed. I’m currently struggling with all of my might.”

“Good, Good. As expected of a young people. One needs to do their best.”

Saying that Earl Salzberg directed his eyes at Ryouma.

“By the way, let me change the topic a little bit, tonights riot, was it instigated by you?”

“That is right, after considering the security around the city...”

The content of the words that came out of both men were dangerous.

However, they keep talking as if they were drinking buddies.

“Fumu, it seems your aims have succeeded. Most of the guards are currently trying to suppress the riot. Although it is splendid, don’t you think it was a bit cowardly? After the first battle, I heard from Signiz and Roberto, your army seems to be quite a marvelous one. I heard there were many young boys and girls among them... But to be honest, I never thought they could fight on equal terms against my forces.”

“I did this because the death rate would increase if I naively wage a war from the front.”

Hearing Ryouma’s response, Earl Salzberg showed a bitter smile. Certainly, there was no reason for the soldiers to die if there was a way. A soldier was akin to a pawn in a chess, they were many, but one should not wastefully spend them. Much less, when talking about people, not a chess piece, an aspect one could not just brush over.

Ryouma words were right as a commander. However, Earl Salzberg knew the real intention behind these words.

“I see... You don’t want your war potential to decline further eh? Which mean you’re not going to stop after this war... Next would be Lupis Rozerianus’ head is it?”

In response to Earl Salzberg question Ryouma kept silent. However, the fierce smile on his face gave away everything.

“Fumu, It seems I was right... But still, I could not understand something. Why did you do this? Certainly, her majesty Lupis had broken the promises made between the two of you, but your opponent is a ruler of a country you know? Looking at your position, the results can be said to be certain. Besides, even if you manage to win one way or another. It was impossible for this country to exist without the current system. In my eyes, it was you who don’t seem to understand that...”

“So, you saying that I should live following that woman’s will?”

Toward Earl Salzberg question, Ryouma responded with a smile of ridicule. Certainly, following this world’s common sense where social status existed, Mikoshiba Ryouma actions could be considered as wrong.

Of course, Ryouma anger itself was justifiable. However, such justification only worked if both sides had an equal position. A teacher might accuse a student of a mistake, but

only a few students would accuse the teacher of a mistake, and to do that the student would need considerable preparation and labor. It would be easy for a president to blame the mistake of his men, but it would be difficult for his subordinates to blame the president's mistake. Someone who did that need to prepare for resignation. No matter which world, people were never equal.

"Certainly, I also think that somewhat frustrating. However, by obeying her, you won't lose anything, don't you? In fact, you gained many things after being given the aristocrats status. Both money and women, you can have as much as you wanted. Wearing luxurious costumes, enjoying delicious drinks and cuisine, and also sharing a bed with a beautiful woman. Don't you think those worth more than rebelling?"

"Well, that's true..." In response to the Earl's question, Ryouma nodded quietly.

Mikoshiha Ryouma was without a doubt a healthy man. He also had the desire to spend a sweet night with a beautiful woman, and also the desire to eat delicious food. Although he had not much interest in clothes, it was also the truth that he enjoyed the clothes being specially tailored for him more than normal clothes. However...

"I understand what the Earl wishes to convey. However, for me, I have something more important than those luxuries..."

"Ho? And what is that?"

(Now then, I should not get lost here... Was it for moral justice? Was it for a righteous government? Or for love and friendship? Maybe hatred and anger? No matter which one, I think all of them are correct.)

Hearing Earl Salzberg question, many words floated inside Ryouma's mind that disappeared afterwards. –

"Who knows? I wonder what that is..."

He shrugged his shoulders with a bitter smile on his face. That answer really represented Ryouma's heart.

Any sublime intention would lose its meaning as soon as one used it as words. However, even though he could not express it in words, Ryouma didn't feel any hesitation in his actions.

The light that dwelled in his eyes was an absolute confidence in his abilities.

Something that Earl Salzberg lost after he killed his own father and took over the household.

“As expected of a young person. How enviable... I’ve thrown away that kind of feeling far into the past...”

Earl Salzberg shook his head while narrowing his eyes looking envious. In fact, it was true that Earl Salzberg envied Mikoshiba Ryouma. There was something that Ryouma had which the Earl didn’t have.

“I wonder, what was the cause for your change?”

The moment he heard the question, Earl Salzberg changed his expression.

“What do you mean?”

Despite maintaining a calm expression, Earl Salzberg face had evidently become stiff. As a warrior and a ruler, Earl Salzberg had outstanding skills and achievements. There was no reason for him to be drowned in self-indulgence.

“Earl Salzberg, I heard about you from Elena-san... As someone who had supported the Rozeria Kingdom, why did you change...”

That was a question that didn’t need to be answered.

For Ryouma right now, all he needed to do was to kill Earl Salzberg.

However, Ryouma wished to know the reason. As to why the well respected Earl changed into the man he is presently.

“Hou... I see, now that you mention it, Elena-dono also was there during that time...”

Following Ryouma’s gaze, Earl Salzberg told him about his past. A past he never wished to remember.

Chapter 33

Castle Poisoning 8

“When was the first time I stood on the battlefield, I wonder? It was an era when war with the Zalda Kingdom and the Mist Kingdom continuously happened each year... That was more than two decades ago...”

Earl Salzberg began talking while thinking of the distant past. Thomas Salzberg first stood on the battlefield while he was still in his teens. He had the physical prowess and military talent inherited from his father. And the characteristic of absorbing prana was from his mother. Earl Salzberg was born with the privileges of being a genius and the optimal environment, he was a warrior with appropriate competence as the ruling class in this world.

“In my first campaign, I managed to kill 25 Zalda’s Knights, conscripted many citizens and invited them to enjoy in the bloodbath.”

He spoke with both confidence and pride.

In terms of common sense, in Ryouma’s previous world, it was not necessary for the legitimate aristocratic successors to go out on the front line, and it was easy for them to avoid dangerous acts just because they held such a position, but in this world the story was different. The higher your position was, the more strength you’re asked to have. In this world, there was an existence that was far beyond the category of warfare, called monsters, with martial arts and magic arts being intertwined. People born with an ability equal to a thousand man. There was also such warrior that were deemed as legends. And the problem with those words were meant in the literal meaning.

Numbers was certainly important in wars of this world, but outstanding individuals, they could overturn such logic. Because of that, both commanders and rulers needed a higher power to stand above their subordinates. in order for them to survive. Because of this kind of world, the aristocrats of this world were very proficient in battle. Conversely, only if there were some special circumstances, that those who supposedly could not inherit the house title got the inheritance instead, or they had some special ability that no one had. And the young Earl Salzberg had all of it. Also, he

had a profound ideal...

“When I was young, I wanted to become a good lord, admired by the people. What I thought was only about the people’s well being and to protect the country from invaders.”

Toward those words, Ryouma nodded silently. According to the information that the Iga clan collected, Earl Salzberg, before he inherited the house was very different. A man who did not hesitate to put himself in the middle of a battlefield, faithfully protected Rozeria Kingdom’s northern border.

The young Earl always thought about the people first. Such evaluation would be very unexpected, looking at the current Earl. However, it was the truth that his younger days were like that. Everything changed, more than a decade ago.

It was around a year after Elena Steiner had lost her family because of Hodram Ahleberg’s plotting.

“That night the moon was covered with thick cloud...”

Ryouma turned his eyes to the window calmly while nodding after hearing Earl Salzberg mutter.

“That was the day, you lost your fiancée was it?”

“That is right. That was the day I lost the woman I loved very much, in the blink of an eye...”

The scene at that time passed through Earl Salzberg mind. It was neither a good memory nor was it memorable.

It was a memory full of humiliation and ridicule.

(Well, having that kind of fate, I guess no wonder for a human being to turn distorted... Though truthfully I thought it was such a pity...)

Ryouma shrugged his shoulders. Earl Salzberg had done one mistake which otherwise would’ve made him a hero. And that was inviting the jealousy and envy of many people.

From the early age, Earl Salzberg had a fiancée. That person was Asteria, the second daughter of viscount the Muhlbach household. The Muhlbach family was a prestigious family having close ties with Duke Gerhardt and a rich commercial territory close to the capital city Pireaus.

The relationship between Earl Salzberg and Asteria Muhlbach was very intimate since a young age.

For the servants of the Earl, it was a memorable time when they saw Earl Salzberg and Lady Asteria playing in the garden, they would also often go back and forth between each others residences.

However, although one could have an intimate relationship during a young age, it did not necessarily mean it would continue into the future.

In many cases, a relationship could change as time went on.

Because Viscount Muhlbach territory was in the suburbs of the Kingdom's capital city, they had many entertainment areas to hold tea parties for the aristocrats, such as the theater.

A place where otherworldly gorgeous and sophisticated gentlemen gather.

Now, how about Earl Salzberg?

His territory itself was larger compared to Viscount Muhlbach.

Because his territory was placed on a remote area, close to a foreign enemy and the harsh wortenian peninsula, he was pushed into a world of a warrior while being a nobleman.

However, looking at the power balance within the Rozeria Kingdom, Earl Salzberg was only an independent force on the frontier. His influence was extremely restricted only around Rozeria's Northern areas , and his ranking in court was akin to that of decoration. Even though he was famous, little interest was directed towards him. If only was Earl Salzberg well versed in not just military tactics, but in politics, the situation would be completely different, but unfortunately he was born purely as a warrior.

Certainly as a warrior serving the Rozeria Kingdom, the path of his succession was never questioned.

However, what about being an aristocrat? People hate different things and even though he was a nobleman with military fame, Earl Salzberg never showed himself in court, and for Rozeria aristocrats such behavior was different compared to other nobles.

Nevertheless, everything was kept in line based on a delicate balance.

However, Thomas Salzberg's presence destroyed that balance.

And finally that incident occurred.

"For those people, the honor I had as a warrior seemed to irritate them."

In the war against the Mist Kingdom, Thomas Salzberg slaughtered the enemy general and brought victory to the Rozeria army.

Elena who became the reinforcement reported such news to the King. For her as a general who managed Rozeria Kingdom's military affairs, what she did was something natural, however the situation proceeded to the worst possible direction.

Thomas Salzberg was being invited to a dance party hosted by the king. While there, he saw something. He was being left alone while his fiancée danced with two young nobles. Of course, soon Thomas decided to intervene,

"That was the aim of those guys..."

Extreme anger appeared on Earl Salzberg face while he continued to talk.

The young Thomas didn't understand the meaning of Asteria dancing with another man behind his back. And that such action was actually being allowed by viscount Muhlback. At the time, he accidentally noticed, that the nobles had ulterior motives, and Thomas who was ignored by his fiancé was thoroughly defeated. He was ridiculed as a pathetic hero who was being ignored by his own fiancée. The party that supposedly celebrated him as a hero was being crushed by his own fiancée.

There was nothing more miserable than that for him.

Behind people's scornful gaze, Thomas Salzberg left the castle. While holding deep the hatred inside his heart.

“Is that all of it?”

Certainly, Ryouma thought of that as a pity. However, he believed that was not the only thing that changed Earl Salzberg. Not to mention that they were nobles, they both should have understood that the kingdom was the priority. After hearing Earl Salzberg story, Ryouma asked further while sighing. –

“Well, that was just the beginning, I did tell you that, didn’t I?”

A ferocious smile appeared on Earl Salzberg face. An unexpected relationship catastrophe. And ridicule from the surroundings. In other words, The Earl must’ve noticed. There was no value in serving this nation and the people up to the point of throwing away one own pleasure. However, those incidents alone were not the reason why Earl Salzberg broke...

There was something else, a decisive event.

“I see... Well, I would be happy if you told me the story much faster but...”

However, Earl Salzberg shook his head slowly and pulled his sword from its sheath that was hanging by his side.

“No, the time is short. Let us talk with our swords instead.”

His voice, icy cold seemed like the contents of the story were something he didn’t want to talk about too much. The sword he pulled out reflected the candle light. His sword stance eloquently told Ryouma that he refused to talk any further.

“Is that so? Well, fine then...”

To be honest, Ryouma wanted to keep talking with Earl Salzberg. After northern Rozeria unification, Ryouma will once again visit the royal capital, Pireaus. The biggest enemy of Ryouma was Lupis Rozerianus, and also the aristocrats who supported her.
<TLN: How ironic, a few years ago, his enemies were those who opposed Lupis>

Since he needed to know the enemy’s mind, Earl Salzberg story could be used as valuable information. However, Ryouma also understood that bringing up such a story would only hurt the Earl.

“Grant me this opportunity to keep you company.”

As he said that, Ryouma took out his sword from its sheath and performed eight directions stance. <TLN: Hassho no kamae>

Chapter 34

Castle Poisoning 9

The violent clashing of metal could be heard coming from inside the room. For a moment, countless red sparks scattered in front of Ryouma, as Earl Salzburg's face nearly touched his own. It was enough that both men could feel each other's breathing. However, in the next moment the overlapping shadow jumped away from each other again.

(I missed my chance huh?)

While feeling the wound on his right arm, Ryouma looked at Earl Salzburg standing right in front of him. Despite being wounded, Ryouma didn't show any gap in his stance. Through rigorous training with his grandfather Koichiro, Ryouma gained resistance to pain. Of course, that alone didn't mean he didn't feel any pain at all. If one had to say it, it was more akin to willpower and patience when dealing with the pain.

But on the battlefield, winning or losing changes greatly depending on whether or not one could do such a thing. –

(Once again, I should be thankful to that grandfather of mine eh?)

It would be a problem if he didn't feel pain, but it was also a problem if his skill was dulled because he feared pain. One can suppress pain with willpower and fighting spirit, but when pain was feared, the only possible outcome was dulling one's own skill.

The only way to prevent the fear of pain was getting used to it. Seeing Ryouma's appearance Earl Salzburg's lips curled, it was a smile of a beast that had tasted the blood of his own relative.

The Earl was having fun inside his mind. The intense exchange of offense and defense.

“Ho hum... It seems that wound alone isn't enough. Most of the people I've faced would be finished by now... Only you are different.”

Ryouma instinctively smiled at the Earl's words mixed with sarcasm and praise. It might be because he had the intention of wait-and-see, but Ryouma could feel Earl Salzberg didn't show much of his ability yet.

(The three important factors... His speed, power, and skill, I think he was the best among the enemy I have fought so far... I've never doubted Elena-san's ability when judging others abilities, he is indeed as good as she said...)

Ever since he was summoned to this world, Mikoshiba Ryouma had gone through many life and death situations. Among them, two people, Kyle Iruna during the Rozeria Kingdom civil war, and Greg Moore who he met during the confrontation with the Ortomea Empire were particularly impressive for Ryouma.

Physical strength increased by magic arts, and the solid confidence backed by their experiences through many battlefields. It was true that both Kyle and Greg boasted enough ability to be called first class warriors in this world. Also, Christ Morgan, one of Elena's aides who specialized in fast spear fighting. He was still young with many immature parts, but his talent and skill were one of the best Ryouma had met in this world. Those three people were undoubtedly strong men in this world.

However, compared to Earl Salzberg, those three people were still lacking. His inner strength, technique, body strength, Earl Salzberg had them at a very high level. Furthermore, if one believed in the Earl's words, he had only been using Anahata Chakra in this battle. <TLN: The Fifth level, Muladhara as the first, Sahashara as the seventh, the highest, known as the Crown Chakra>

(From the story I heard, The Earl should be able to use chakra up to the sixth level. In other words, it is possible for him to use Ajna Chakra)

It was said that Sahashara chakra which was said to be at the top of the head, was the same as the eyes on the palm of the one thousand armed Avalokiteshvara. Speaking of Buddhist teachings when one reached that point, he or she had reached the point of enlightenment.

Considering Taoist thought, that would be on the level of being 'one who was not being bound by earthly desires'. <TLN: Written as "Sennin" could also be translated as 'Hermit'>

Basically being on the level of a superman. Thus based on that theory, Ajna Chakra was

said to be the highest point reachable by humans. Ryouma himself could not imagine how much power it could release, but there was only one thing he was sure of. And that was Earl Salzberg was indeed the strongest enemy he had ever faced.

However, even with such objective point of view, Ryouma didn't feel despair, he instead felt excited.

(‘Well, I already knew all of that since the time I decided to do this battle after all...)

Ryouma had learned how to control Chakra with the help of the Marfisto sisters. After that, the Prana he absorbed from his battles on the Wortenia peninsula and the time he was doing reinforcement duty at the Zalda Kingdom, he had managed to open up to the third chakra, Manipura. In this world, Mikoshiba Ryouma could be considered among the strong warriors, but compared to Earl Salzberg he was still inferior. If Ryouma clashed swords from the front, sooner than later the Earl would catch him unguarded and strike , but facing him, Ryouma also held a secret.

(What's left now is whether or not this guy would accept me as an appropriate master.)

'Ryouma turned his eyes toward the sword (wailing of the restless ghost) in his hands. The five hundred year old wish. It was time for the treasured sword to show its true power.

Chapter 35

Castle Poisoning 10

Two shadows danced inside the room. The sound of steel clashing, rough breathing reverberated inside the room.

“Fumu. I don’t know that when I used my fifth chakra you’d still be able to fight against me, I don’t know whether it was because you wanted to hide your abilities or you really were only able to use Manipura chakra, regardless you’re good...”

Earl Salzberg directed words of admiration at Ryouma which was rare. In this world’s martial arts fights, the amount of Prana one possessed and the level of Chakra one could release often was the one who decided victory. For example, Prana was akin to that of gasoline, and Chakra was like that of an engine.

Naturally, the more horsepower, the more powerful the engine, and if there is more more gasoline the longer the engine can run...

(the analogy is unnecessary)

Earl Salzberg was already using up to Vishudda chakra. The Earl admired Mikoshiba Ryouma who was able to deal with his attack.

“In your swordsmanship, I can feel a refined elegance that I can hardly believe belonged to a mercenary. I don’t know what school you’re in, but you seem to have a good teacher... How enviable. Do all people of the other world use such swordsmanship? I’m certain that you were born in a country called Japan...”

Hearing his words, Ryouma instinctively laughed bitterly. Though he didn’t desperately hide his identity, if he had to choose, Ryouma wish that his identity remained hidden. No matter which world, there were two kinds of information, one that needed to be hidden from the public, and the other that could be diffused. That was something fundamental. Some information was only known to a small part of the government, while the general public has information that was intentionally being transmitted to the whole world. Specifically, confidential information on national

defense or diplomacy would apply in the former case, and in the latter case something like an advertisement on the launch of a new product. Either way, it was important to keep some secrets and control the time to release them. From his point of view, the information regarding Mikoshiba Ryouma was something he wanted to kept secret. Especially the information that he was from Japan. The reason was that just like food dishes, martial arts have strong ties with a nation's history and culture.

For example, Capoeira, a traditional Brazilian martial art was an art that was dominated by footwork, but it was also said to have been influenced and linked to slave trading's origins , that was the reason they couldn't use their hand, it was because the practitioners' hands were chained. <TLN: Depending on where you're from, history may vary>

Another example would be old fashioned Karate, there was a technique using sticks and sickles as weapons instead of swords and spears, the reason being the Ryukyu royal family prohibited common folks from carrying weapons with them. Well, even if we set aside the authenticity of it, it was the truth that individual martial arts are rooted in the original country's history and culture.

The impact of knowing Ryouma was from Japan, was not just the martial arts, people with an education, might be able to imagine it.

Setting aside how many problems could occur because of it , it was indeed never beneficial to Mikoshiba Ryouma if the truth of his origin was being known by others.

(Earl Salzberg is a strong sadistic man. He also good at planning. Did he think of that by himself, or...)

It was necessary for one to identify the source of information. In worst case scenario, he might need to order Iga clan to place a gag on people who knew about the secret.

Ryouma then casually asked Earl Salzberg about it while enduring the desire to click his tongue.

"So you knew that I was from Japan?"

"Of course. Since you tried to get information on me, it would be natural I did the same to you. I did that, right after you came and brought the business regarding the rock salt."

“That is... But well, I guess that is natural...”

It was natural for someone doing business to check the other party identity. –

(This man, I guess I look down on him too much huh? I thought he would be much more bird brain but...)

The thought that the Earl was a bad guy and a greedy man may have clouded Ryouma’s eyes. Among the nobles Ryouma had encountered, the Earl was indeed among the first rate, even outside of his battle prowess.

“You think so too yes?”

“Indeed, in battle, one needs to know oneself and the enemy after all.”

Listening to Ryouma’s words, Earl Salzberg breaks into a smile. –

“I see, that was the proverb of another world, is it?... Strangely fitting indeed. But well, in this world, many people still unable to think of such basic thinking you know? Though deplorable indeed...!”

At the same time as he ended his words, Earl Salzberg attacked Ryouma once again.

Chapter 36

Castle Poisoning 11

The Earl's sword grazed Ryouma's right cheek.

At that moment, intense heat like one being touched by hot iron hit Ryouma.

At first, there was no apparent change.

However, the wound opened little by little.

The blood appeared began to drip down on Ryouma's chest. and dyed it red. –

Ryouma didn't feel pain.

If he had to say it, he felt uncomfortable that his cheek felt wet.

That might be because of a large amount of adrenaline produced inside his body.

What boils inside Ryouma's heart right now was pure admiration.

Even when Earl Salzberg performed a surprise attack, Ryouma didn't feel any indignation toward himself who was unable to fully block the attack.

Certainly, a blow in the middle of a conversation could create a surprise.

It was without a doubt such an act could be regarded as cowardly.

However, was there any value saying such criticism?

Making a surprise attack, sneak attack, or causing agitation on the enemy by using words were the basis of fighting. If one had to say, it was natural for a fighter to do that.

The two people who faced each other with swords were not dancing, they were people trying to kill each other.

And there was no rule when it comes to taking the enemy's life.

Only result that matters. Live, or dead...

The reason for Ryouma admiration was something different, it was...

"That surprises me... To think you could shrink the ground... I have no intention of being careless but, that indeed surprise me..."

Somewhat weakened, blood keeps dripping from Ryouma's cheek. Having his body full of adrenaline aside, it was evident that the wound he sustained was quite deep.

Ryouma smiled widely while his cheek and chest dyed in red.
Hearing Ryouma's casual words, Earl Salzberg laughed loudly.

"Oh my, you're truly indeed a good warrior. In my memory, only a handful of people manage to block that attack of mine. Furthermore, I did it while doing a surprise attack. I never expected to hear words of praise instead of blaming words."

"Someone who said something like that is just a loser..."

Saying that Ryouma shrugged his shoulders.

Sports have rules. However, there was no rule when it comes to killing.

Though that was not entirely accurate, in general, rules were meaningless when it comes to killing each other. –

That was the basic understanding unless they were fighting in a special circumstance and place like an official duel.

Besides, they didn't decide on any rules before starting killing each other either.

Since common consciousness to hold rules didn't exist, cheating also ceased to exist.

Furthermore, there was no audience around, only two people, Earl Salzberg, and Mikoshiba Ryouma presented in this room.

If they didn't leave a document stipulated the rules, then what the meaning of having verbal rules with no witness.

For rules to be effective as a rule, someone with absolute power was essential.

If one were to breach the rule, that someone could bestow heavy penalty.

That was the reason why, in Ryouma's previous world, even if people said they hate wars, the wars never ceased from existence.

In term of current battles, far from having no meaning in blaming the opponent as a coward, the most such an act would do only making one lost calmness and digging one own grave instead.

Ryouma didn't criticize Earl Salzberg was because he understood that.

However, if Ryouma attitude touched Earl Salzberg heart string then, he was indeed want to laugh a little bit.

"Good, really good. Words of chivalry are only something a knight that didn't know of battlefield should speak..."

"Well, though many people still believe and adhere to the chivalry way..."

“Come to think of it, during the civil war, you seem to have some trouble with that eh?”

Ryouma smiles bitterly thinking at whom such words were being directed.

“Right, just as you said...”

Cold and rational thought, pursuing one of profit by all means necessary. To be honest, Ryouma and Earl Salzberg was similar being. Originally, such a characteristic would attract them to be a friend.

(Truthfully, how regrettable... But then again, it is impossible for me to reorganized my hands now...)

The various thought crossed Ryouma’s mind, but the death of Earl Salzberg had been deemed necessary.

Although he was the mastermind, the time was already past the stage where he could overturn the plan just because Mikoshiba Ryouma wanted to. <TLN: The die has been cast>

(But still... To be able to use shrink distance is...)

The blow the Earl did before might be categorized as a special move.

Shrinking distance.

In a sense, it was almost a warp-like travel used by men in space era, but in martial arts worlds, it was different.

Fast and bewitching steps technique was used to fill the intervals, such technique refer to the erasing of one initial movement and draw an attack... It was something that the martial artist could attain after refining their ability for a long time...

For Mikoshiba Ryouma, the enemy in front of him was again on a whole another level.

“I have no choice. I also need to use my secret art I guess...”

“Ho ho, you still have something up your sleeves eh? Hahaha, you’re indeed an interesting man.”

Hearing the Earl’s words, Ryouma shrugged his shoulders, while Earl Salzberg kept

laughing.

“Though there’s a problem with it... and I don’t want to use it too much...”

Power began to come to both of his hands.

This trump card was something that could invite Ryouma to a place beyond men. This trump card made him able to kill a huge monster by himself.

However, a mighty power would destroy one own body if one were to fail in controlling it.

“Wake up, [Kikoku]. I offer you to carry those hatreds with this body of mine.”

Such whisper comes out of Ryouma’s mouth.

Chapter 37

Castle Poisoning 12

As if responding to Mikoshiba Ryouma's words, a countless pattern emerged from the bled, dazzling red and black dyed the carpet.

The patterns blinked as if it was breathing.

Then eventually, the blade was fully dyed red.

At that moment, Earl Salzberg could feel chill down his spine.

(What is this...)

The chilling feeling he had never felt on any battlefield was assailing his body.

The atmosphere noticeably becomes filled with an intense thirst for blood.

It gives off the feeling that the atmosphere didn't belong to the living.

The situation was exactly what people usually call bloodcurdling.

Earl Salzberg heard rattling metallic sounds, thus he directed his gaze at his own hands.

(I'm trembling? Did I feel fear?)

Earl Salzberg was a strong man. Even Queen Lupis, in a sense, fell behind the Earl.

He had overwhelming power as an individual. And also as a warrior.

As the Earl who ruled the northern part of the Rozeria Kingdom, Earl Salzberg was indeed powerful but, that alone was something he had no choice but get affixed on him

Since the day he was young, he had continued to kill people and the monsters that

appeared from the Wortenia peninsula.

The number might not exceed one thousand.

But, as the result of the countless battle, he had accumulated experience and fighting ability as well as Prana that was higher than even Elena Steiner, which was being referred to as the White Goddess of War.

If the famous Mikhail Banashu or Chris Morgan who was known as GodspeedSpear faced against Earl Salzberg, they might end up dead in a few minutes.

Yet, the Earl who boasted such capacity was shaking in fear due to the smell of death released by Mikoshiba Ryouma.

“To think I’m being overwhelmed like this... That sword... That is not just your ordinary magic sword isn’t it? To possess this kind of power... It can only mean that sword is a demon sword or cursed sword...”

The Earl gazed at his magic sword in his hand and clicked his tongue.

(This sword is indeed a family heirloom, but, the sword itself is just an excellent sword, nothing more. Which make me in disadvantage I guess? But even if I strengthen my magic arts and activated the sword’s engraving magic, I’m not sure if I could cut that from the front...)

In this world, a sword with engraving sword was called a magic sword.

The engraved weapons could exert various effects when the weapon user applied their Prana to the weapon.

It was the type of weapon that never lost its sharpness.

For warrior living on the battlefield, no weapon better than such weapon.

Depending on the inscription engraved on the weapon, one could summon the wind or even fired it.

Such magic weapon pushed the user competence one step further.

However, just like people where there would always be someone better than you, such thing also the same for a magic sword.

As such, there were swords with particularly strong power such as Holy Swords, Demon Swords, and Cursed Swords.

The power between Holy swords and Magic swords were vastly different.

Only one thing that could be said.

And that was when those weapons were wielded by warriors with a reasonable ability, their power could slaughter even a huge monster single-handedly.

“Interesting. I knew it since we first met, that you’re an interesting guy!”

Loud laughter from Earl Salzberg echoed inside the room.

Indeed, it can’t be helped if Earl Salzberg felt this situation as fun.

Since the day he lost his pride as nobility and knight, Earl Salzberg had always longed for something like this.

A thirst that cannot be healed, from all the property he now had, the delicious food he now could eat, the girls he raped just for fun, all of that could not heal him.

It was as if he lived without purpose.

However, right now, Earl Salzberg felt excited.



“You will surely heal this thirst of mine...”

As he said that, Earl Salzberg put his sword into its sheath and lowered his waist.

It was a very familiar stance for Ryouma.

“That stance... lai? How, did you know that?”

Looking at Ryouma's attitude who cannot hide his confusion, Earl Salzberg smirked and laughed hard.

"That's right, your world. It is a technique that was handed down to this world a long time ago..."

It was a stance that was used by an expert.

And it seems the Earl didn't do that stance just because he wanted to.

(A stance that waits patiently. I guess it would be bad for me to attack carelessly from here now...)

A sword was drawn from a perfect stance, the speed would be so fast that it could be regarded as lightning speed.

In Ryouma's eyes, he could see the three-meter absolute radius centered around Earl Salzberg.

A ruthless attack would come at him if he carelessly approaches the Earl.

(There's only one way for me to take...)

Ryouma quietly put his sword into its sheath, and took the same stance as Earl Salzberg.

Two control zone.

While concentrated their mind and feeling, they slowly narrowed their 10 meters distance.

How much time had passed?

At that moment. The two invisible radius touched slightly.

Chapter 38

And the Stage Returns to the Kingdom Again

A sword slash approached Ryouma's head with fast speed.

He barely able to dodge it causing his cheek to bleed badly.

Looking at the blood dripping down from his chin one could see that it was quite a deep wound.

"I manage to avoid it but... He was better than rumor said... If I didn't have Kikoku's power, I would be dead by now. I must thank Genou for this..."

Ryouma breathing heavily while looking at Earl Salzberg who fell down on the floor.

The two people who aimed at one-shot victory ended with Mikoshiba Ryouma's victory.

However, Ryouma just barely won.

Using the power of his sword, he somehow manages to forcibly open the sixth chakra Ajna, for five minutes, but the recoil was very big.

In regard to skill, Earl Salzberg had some truly extraordinary skills.

His breathing, fluency of his movement, and the mind that seek for a chance.

His refined swordsmanship had reached an area that was even if he created his own school based on his swordsmanship, it would be normal.

Ryouma didn't know how did the people of this world knew about Iai stance, but Earl Salzberg stance was indeed comparable to that of his grandfather, Mikoshiba Koichiro.

Ryouma and Earl Salzberg. Without a doubt, these two men were equal in term of skill and mind.

What separates these two equal men was...

(The difference in mental attitude huh...)

For Ryouma, this battle was a fight for survival.

If he only stands and watches, he would definitely be crushed by Lupis.

In order to avoid that, it was absolutely necessary to have control over the northern Rozeria Kingdom.

To say it clearly, he did this battle with his back on the wall.

Not to mention, Ryouma also had the life and future of his subordinates on his shoulders.

The heavy pressure was very unbearable even for the bold Ryouma.

On the other hand, how about Earl Salzberg?

Although the result might be different if it was the previous Earl, the current Earl was a silly noble who turns his back on the world, drowned himself in wealth, and enjoyment.

The sword who betted his life and future versus the sword of a man who drowned in luxury.

It can be said those two difference was what decide the fate of both men.

In the first place, the difference of those two difference, only as thick as a paper.

One can say that only God knows who will win if they both fight once again.

(Well, it's not like there's a second chance though...)

Ryouma smiled at his own ridiculous thought.

It was self-mockery for the thought like he was an athlete.

Separately, he had no intention of looking down on athlete particularly.

However, there was a difference between competition duel and duel to the death.

The difference was, when we were in a competition duel, there was always the next duel.

The competition duel was sometimes only a rehearsal for the public performance that may come some day.

And since it was a rehearsal, you may lose how many times you liked. –

Certainly, some duel performed in a competitive tournament might decide the fighter's future, and it had seriousness and passion.

However, in a competition duel, there was always the next time.

Even if the tournament ended, there will be always the next tournament.

Some player might say they bet their own life in those tournaments, but in the end, no player actually dies.

In a sense, they express life and death in a tournament by doing retirement.

But, a duel to the death was very different.

It was extremely rare for the pair to be equal in ability, there were some cases where the fighters were matching but, such case was rare.

It can be said that death was set on one of them when the battle starts.

There was no room for debating the possibility of a different outcome.

Because only a dead body remained in front of the winner.



No one knew how long the time had passed, Ryouma was on his knees staring at the Earl.

A few tens of second, a few minutes? no one knew...

Before anyone knew it, a shadow stood firmly behind Ryouma.

“My lord...”

“How are the people inside the mansion?”

Ryouma asked without turning back.

It was not necessary for him.

Because he knew that the entire mansion was already under his control.

“There’s no problem. Signiz Garbera-dono and Yuria Salzberg we’ve managed to secure them...”

“I see... How about Roberto Bertrand?”

“There’s also no problem. Now that the medicine is working, I think he will wake up tomorrow noon.”

“Good. Treat them politely for now. However, please attach more than one guard on them...”

“Understood.”

Ryouma wanted Signiz and Roberto in his hand.

It took time for him to catch Elmera, Signiz Garbera childhood nanny, the person that was said to be the only weakness Signiz Garbera had.

Then Signiz who surrendered, following Ryouma’s order, made his best friend, Roberto, drank a sleeping pill.

For Signiz, he had no other way than surrender.

“Now then, next is how to calm the noise outside...”

Ryouma turned his line of sight toward the window.

Although it was him who instigate it, it was true that he cannot let the fire continue like this.

Because the fortified city of Epiroz was already a property of the Baron Mikoshiba.

However, it seems Ryouma not need to worry about that.

“There’s already an arrangement made by Lione-sama. With Yuria-dono cooperation, it won’t take much time to quell down the commotion... That was the message they left with me...”

Ryouma could felt the excitement in the words of the shadow.

He definitely wanted to immediately spread the words of victory, thinking that, Ryouma smiled.

“I understand... Go.”

Hearing the Ryouma’s words, the shadow bowed and faded into the darkness.

(With this, finally I took the first step...)

It was up to the future process but without Earl Salzberg, the power of the ten northern aristocrats was greatly reduced.

This was the first step of Mikoshiba Ryouma nation building.

However, it was also the start of a battle to the death against his enemy filled with a grudge...

(Next, how will Queen Lupis move... Will she exercise her power, or...)

For better or worse, this world was a world of power.

The weak were eaten by the strong, the strong were eaten by the stronger one.

It was a world filled with fighting.

(Just like a poisonous insect...)

When being placed inside the pot, the insects would each other until one last standing...

Apart from the appearance, this world feels like the pot filled with such insect.

Even if he was now the strongest in northern Rozeria, next he would be thrown into a pot named the entire Rozeria Kingdom. And naturally, the result would be...

(However, I cannot back down now...)

Ryouma gently touched Earl Salzburg dead body.

It was the only respect he could give for the dead enemy in front of him.

Epilogue

Few days had passed since Mikoshiba Ryouma killed Earl Salzberg and gain control over the fortified city Epiroz.

This place was Trisstron, the border city located southwest of the Epiroz.

By nature, it was a prospered city because of its function as a trade base with the Zalda Kingdom.

“I guess, he had said something about this long time ago...”

Hearing Elena’s words, Chris stiffened.

He could understand why Elena looked bleak.

But even right now, it was only because of Elena fame and power that they could maintain the condition of the Tristron city which had become a den-of-thieves.

Elena’s remark was something that would change the future.

And right now, only Chris presented inside the room.

That was why, even if some accidental words appeared, nothing will likely happen.

And the safest thing was not to talk about it. –

“I understand your feeling. But here is...”

Sensing the meaning of his ambiguous words, Elena sighs once again and handed over the next document to Chris.

The document she had been handling was the request to improve the security raised by the citizen. Furthermore, the petition came from the commerce association who control Tristron economy.

Elena could not help feeling irritated because of the mountain of documents being sent to her again and again without any break.

Of course, it was not like she could not handle it.

In fact, Elena had experience ruling over a land occupied during a war.

For Elena who could even successfully governed over the enemy citizen, there was no reason for her to fail at governing her own country's people.

However, ability aside, it was a fact that the current situation was a burden for Elena and also a major power abuse.

Of course, because of the circumstance no one going to criminalized her, but that didn't mean she had to take the risk either.

(Had I didn't put my hands on it, I can see that the administration of Tristron city would be paralyzed. And when that happens, even if reinforcement request come from Zalda, we could do nothing...)

Elena's role was to come as fast as possible the moment the Zalda Kingdom asked for reinforcement.

It was clear that the Ortomea Empire which withdraws its soldiers once again would make a move.

In the first place, this Tristron had no lord. In other words, this was one of the royal territories, the administration was handled by a magistrate appointed by the Royal authority.

And the reason why government affair documents crossed Elena Steiner desk was simply due to her ability.

(Well, for those who has the brain, it would be natural for them to have thought that there was no point making a petition at this late hour...)

Elena sighs again after a certain man face appeared inside her mind.

Originally, this Tristron city was famous as a self-sufficient city.

In the past few decades, at the time when a war against the Zalda Kingdom often happens, the soldiers garrisoned in the city moved every day, but in later years, they would only move once or twice every year except for the daily patrol.

With that, it was rare for the city to mobilize all of the two hundred soldiers garrisoned inside the city.

Commercial development had developed satisfactorily, and there was also a reasonable distance between this city and the royal capital.

The distance was enough to be said that the Royal family eyes didn't reach much.

It can be said Tristrion was a land where lonely lower aristocrats could fill their pocket.

If they remained silent, they could make a mountain of golds together with the company based in the city.

However, the situation had changed greatly since she came.

It was true that the scars caused by the previous civil war were quite large.

The aftermath of the fight caused by the divided governing class of the Rozaria Kingdom was devastating.

It was natural that it would have an impact on domestic production and security.

However, it was also normal for the wound to be healed by now.

Some sacrifice was made during the battle of Irachion, but with tens of thousands of soldiers collided against each other, it was a little surprising that there were only small casualties.

(The damage of that battle was surprisingly small...)

Due to the former Duke Gerhardt showing a willingness to surrender, the Irachion city escaped the misery of siege battle.

Some blood flow when they had to purge the knights that swore loyalty to General

Alberg who occupied some part of the city.

However, the clouds turn dark the moment the Rozeria Kingdom received reinforcement request from the Zalda kingdom.

Due to the war, many farmers threw away their fields, and wandering people increased in the Rozeria Kingdom as a whole.

As the result of people flowing into the urban areas, security had become deteriorated extremely.

When wandering homeless people increase, it would also increase the number of thieves.

And unfortunately, Baron Joseph Stein, the magistrate of Tristron city was not competent enough to handle this kind of trouble.

The Baron had called his aide and stay inside the magistrate mansion under the pretense of a sudden illness.

Because of that, Elena only had one choice.

And the result of that was the disastrous scene one can see inside her office.

(But, with this... After the war at Epiroz city is over, next would be...)

Elena had talked with Earl Zeref who came to her the other day

Their conversation was something that a vassal should never have, but there was no other choice left if they wanted to rebuild the Rozeria Kingdom.

She understands that enough to the point of making her feels irritated.

While holding such feelings, Elena kept running the pen on the documents.



That evening, a message come in telling her that Epiroz had fallen.

The stage once again would move to the Royal capital, Prieaus.

Meanwhile, countless speculation was made while causing sparks here and there.



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